

THE HIDDEN PEOPLE

By LEO E. MILLER



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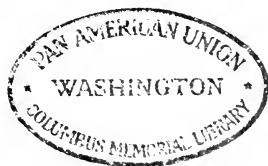
Onward it came, with the speed of an express train
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THE HIDDEN PEOPLE

THE STORY OF
A SEARCH FOR INCAN TREASURE

BY
LEO E. MILLER

ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL BRANSOM



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TO MY SON
LEO EDWARD MILLER, JR.



PREFACE

"THE HIDDEN PEOPLE" is a story of adventure. It relates the experiences of two Americans who go in search of—and locate—the lost treasure of the Incas.

The quest takes the two, accompanied by the giant negro, Moses, whom they discover on the way, into some of the most remote and least-known parts of the Peruvian Andes. Along the route they come face to face with many of the wild denizens of the jungle, both human and animal.

Some of the places touched upon in the course of the story, together with their inhabitants, are assumed; for instance, the arid island and the hidden valley. But the vast majority of descriptions of people and their manners and dress; animal stories and descriptions; and mention of fish, insects, and vegetation are true to life.

LEO E. MILLER.

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THE HIDDEN PEOPLE

CHAPTER I

THE WRECK OF THE "BUENAVENTURA"

VIEWED from the deck of the *Buenaventura*, the giant swells that daily come up from the stormy regions of Cape Horn and dash against the South American coast did not seem so formidable; so the sloop, with all sails set, raced gayly toward the dimly outlined Peruvian shore.

Captain Gonzales, after a casual survey of the billowy green water and the distant line of land, saw no reason for alarm, so he retired to his hammock, strung between the forecastle and the mast, for his midday siesta. The crew, consisting of eight Ecuadorian sailors, had already gone to sleep and lay sprawled on the flat deck, having searched out the spots where the bulging sails cast wavering shadows and furnished welcome shelter from the blistering rays of the overhead tropical sun.

Vicente alone remained awake and was the first to see the danger—when it was too late.

For an Ecuadorian, Vicente had had a varied life far above the commonplace existence of his kind. The sea was his home. As he firmly grasped the handles of the steering-wheel, swinging it first to right then to left, and keeping the schooner on her course, some of the more interesting events of bygone years passed

through his mind. Perhaps it was the bluish smoke from the long black cigar firmly clinched between his strong, white teeth that started the day-dreaming; possibly it may have been the heat, or the wind singing through the rigging. Anyway, his thoughts wandered back to the shambling bamboo hut with the low palm-leaf thatch the ragged edges of which nearly touched the ground, and in which hordes of bats slept by day; when it rained, as it nearly always did, streams of water trickled through the rotten roof and formed pools of mud in the earth floor.

His mother had been an Indian—a Jíbero it was said, brought from the jungles beyond the Loja River by missionaries in order to save her from the vengeance of her head-hunting relatives because she had embraced the faith of the brown-robed *padres*, and thereby incurred the displeasure of the tribe. His memory of her was vague: a dim figure faintly outlined against the smoke of the cooking fire as she moved like a shadow in the darkened interior of the hut; or a bent and tattered form digging in the *conuco* or plantation of bananas, yuccas, and yams, while he watched from the shelter of a little *tambo* of plantain leaves that she had built for him. She had died, unhappy in the thought of ending her days far removed from her native wilds and her people, while he was a small boy.

His father, of Portuguese descent, had labored as a peon on the water-front at Guayaquil. Together with scores of others, he loaded barges for steamers northward bound to Panama and San Francisco, or to Japan, with cacao beans, raw sugar, ivory nuts, and coffee. From early morning until after dark, and occasionally at night as well, the unbroken chain of perspiring men, stripped to the waist, carried the heavy bags from the

huge sheet-iron warehouses on the wharf to the ever-hungry barges. For this back-breaking toil he received scant pay—scarcely enough to provide the barest necessities of life.

When his mother was no more, Vicente had daily followed his father to the river. Soon he learned to swim and joined the crowd of naked urchins that swam out to meet the big steamers slowly nosing their way up the Guayal, to dive for *centavos* thrown to them by the passengers.

Another feat was to dive along one side of the vessel, pass underneath the keel, and then come up on the other side. Afterward he took up a collection, the proceeds of which provided him with food, chocolate, and the vile *cigarillos* he soon learned to smoke.

He seldom returned to the hut, now all but deserted and rapidly falling into decay, that had been home to him. His father did not care and never troubled to look him up when he was missing.

Years passed. He was seventeen, but he did not know it; no one had kept an account of his age. Then he had journeyed to the highlands of Quito, and after a short sojourn in the upland country, the persuasive oratory of the owner of a rubber concession in the tropical lowlands to the east had been enough to induce him to sign for two years' work in the steaming forest. The end of that time found him back in Guayaquil, penniless financially, but rich in jungle lore.

When the tramp schooner *Pirate* called at the port to recruit hands for a cruise in the South Seas, he had gone, in response perhaps to the restless Indian spirit he had inherited from his mother, and that making itself felt, compelled him to take up the life of a wanderer.

The treatment he had received on board the schooner was of the vilest kind. The food was even worse, rotting salt fish and rice comprising the daily ration. His companions were Chinese, negroes, half-breeds, and surly San Blas Indians from the Chagres River in Panama, but his stolid nature forbade him to mingle with them except when duty required.

Day after day the *Pirate* sailed on toward some mysterious goal. When there was a lull in the wind, the ocean became smooth as glass and the heat was stifling; flying-fish in legions shot out of the oily water and soared above the surface, hotly pursued by fleeting dark forms underneath that were in reality ravenous porpoises; schools of whales disported near the ship and blew thin columns of spray high into the air; and long-winged albatrosses soared overhead in a cloudless sky.

One morning, lines of white-capped breakers, booming in the distance, advertised the fact that they had entered the region of coral reefs and atolls. The pilot guided his ship carefully among these dangerous obstructions, steering always to the leeward and keeping a wide stretch of water between them.

Two weeks later the *Pirate* sailed into a protected little cove, and cast anchor near the mouth of a formidable-looking river that emerged from between solid walls of densest forest. There they waited. Rumors began to circulate that they were in the Solomon Islands on a slaving expedition, and the events of the following days proved them correct.

Again, after days of steady sailing, made hideous by the muffled groans and screams of the bushmen confined below, the *Pirate* anchored off Maui in the Hawaiias, and her cargo of half-dead human beings was sold to

work as slaves in the sugar-cane and pineapple plantations.

From Maui the schooner ran into Honolulu to replenish her supplies, and Vicente promptly deserted, for work aboard the slaver had not been to his liking. Life on the balmy tropical isle had at first been as attractive as it was novel. No one seemed to take life seriously; the natives lived in ease and whiled away the days in play and in luxurious plenty. There were parades of *pau* riders, gayly caparisoned in ropes of flowers and foliage; *poi* suppers where every one ate huge bowls of the boiled root of the taro plant; and fêtes at which all the guests were bedecked with wreaths or *lei* of strong-scented flowers.

These things, and many others, he saw from a distance only; they palled on him. His one enjoyable diversion had been swimming in the surf and riding the breakers on the queer little wooden boards used by the natives, a feat requiring great agility, and learned only after many trials.

The shark-fishers won his entire admiration. The skill and daring with which they attacked the fierce tiger-sharks were astonishing. He mingled with them and learned much of the habits of the man-eating terrors of the sea. Old Wailani, who had the reputation of having killed more sharks than any other man in the islands, took a casual interest in Vicente and occasionally permitted him to accompany him in his canoe voyages to the best fishing-banks. The sharks could not attack while swimming upright; they had to turn on their backs, but before this could be accomplished the lithe form of Wailani had shot past them and the deadly knife had been implanted in a vital spot.

Before long an opportunity presented itself to return northward aboard a sugar-ship bound for Panama, and there he had entered into the agreement to serve under Captain Gonzales, whose ship had been chartered by the gold-hunting *gringos*. At thought of the latter, he smiled. Others before them had tried to find the hidden gold of the Incas; that was a matter known to even the most ignorant. All had failed, and many who had ventured into the forbidden kingdom had never returned to tell the story of their unsuccessful search. The land of mystery where jewel-bedecked princes had once lived in palaces of gold, had completely swallowed them.

By shifting his position slightly, he could see the two Americans now eagerly scanning the maps spread out before them on a table in the forecastle. He bit off the ragged end of his cigar and spat in contempt.

A dull roar from the open ocean caught Vicente's ears, and turning quickly he saw a low black cloud bearing rapidly down upon them. He had seen it before, often, and fully understood the menace of the approaching hurricane. A single cry of alarm served to awaken all on board.

There now ensued a deadly calm; the sails drooped like limp rags and the heat was overpowering. In response to the captain's shouted orders, the canvas came down without loss of time—all but the jib which was needed to give the vessel steerageway. Soon, but not one minute too soon, the deck was cleared. They were dangerously near the coast and could do little more than intrust themselves to the mercy of the elements.

The storm broke. With a deafening roar the hurri-

cane came down upon them. The wind wailed and shrieked through the rigging, while mountainous waves crested with a mane of white foam sprang up and, beating against the vessel's sides, threatened to crush her like an egg-shell. A dense fog, rain in torrents, crashing thunder, and blue-green flashes of lightning added their terrors to the gale, and for half an hour the sloop rolled and wallowed helplessly.

Vicente, blinded by rain and water, stuck to his post and did all that was possible to keep the rearing, plunging craft headed into the sea. But it was to no avail. There came a grating sound, audible above the roar of the storm. The ship trembled violently and nearly capsized. Then followed a crash that seemed to rend the hull asunder; giant waves swept over the deck, dashing all hands, like flies, into the seething water.

Fortunately, the first torrent to sweep the deck had already spent much of its force on the rocks, and the rebound had washed the men into the comparatively quiet leeward side of the barrier upon which the vessel had struck; this alone was responsible for the fact that they were not instantly dashed to pieces. Almost before they realized what had happened, they found themselves carried on the undercurrent toward the dim shore-line but a hundred feet away. Gaining the sloping, sandy beach, they stood in a stupefied, huddled group listening to the fearsome roar of the hurricane and the crunching and grinding of heavy timbers on the rocks.

CHAPTER II

STRANDED ON AN ISLAND. THE DISCOVERY OF MOSES

To Boyle and Livingston, standing on the surf-beaten shore of a strange land, the future of their expedition seemed decidedly unpromising. Booming breakers roared like the drum-fire of artillery, but the pounding and snapping of timbers rose occasionally above the din of the tempest. The rain pelted them unmercifully, and the mist was so thick that it was impossible to form any conception of their new surroundings.

Having completed their course at college, the two Americans had started upon a novel way of spending a year's vacation before entering their more serious professional careers. Travel in little-known lands, with the possibility of adventure, had strongly appealed to them. They had been close companions throughout the four years of study, and plans for the Peruvian expedition had been laid during their junior year. Perhaps it was the exploits of Pizarro that fired their imagination and brought to their minds visions of the fabulous wealth of the ancient Incas. Authentic accounts are not lacking to prove that the leaders of the *Conquistadores* sent back to Spain gold and gems by the hundredweight; there was also ample proof that the treasures of the natives had not been exhausted, for, when the treachery of the Spaniards became apparent to them, they hastily stripped their persons,

homes, and temples of the precious ornaments and sacred vessels and concealed them from the eyes of the gold-crazed invaders. To this day the hidden wealth had not been discovered but remained as a lure to the seeker of El Dorado.

Boyle, or Ted as he was usually called, was a youth of sturdy build but somewhat lacking in height. His black hair, dark eyes, and regular and studious face bespoke courage and a high order of intelligence. During his senior year he had rowed on the varsity crew. Possessed of an abundance of initiative, he was nevertheless at times given to depending on others for trivial things, and for information that he might have acquired through his own efforts. His home was on Long Island.

Stanley Livingston, from Indiana, was light-complexioned, tall and slender, and held the record for the two-hundred-yard dash. He was a lover of nature; in fact, his leaning toward natural history dated back as far as he could remember. The expedition into South America, he hoped, would give him abundant opportunities to observe and study the wild life of a little-known continent, in addition, of course, to the main object of the undertaking.

Things are seldom so bad as they at first seem. Presently the storm lifted. The rain ceased, the wind died down, and the fog disappeared before the onslaught of the blistering sun. As the mist melted away, a jutting arm of rock appeared extending out into the water; the *Buenaventura* had struck the very tip of the projection against which foam-capped waves were still hurling themselves with great force.

The thing that occupied the minds of the two Americans more than any other just then was this: If their

outfits and food were lost, it would be impossible to proceed with their venture. Of course, there was the possibility of salvaging some of the things when the storm had cleared, but there was no telling whether or not any of the articles would still be in a serviceable condition. As they recalled with what care the camera, ammunition, and other things of great importance had been packed into tin cases and sealed, their hopes rose. If the sloop only held together, then there might still be a possibility of continuing the journey. Water alone could have no effect on the air-tight containers. But in the event that the sloop went to pieces and the cargo were dashed against the rocks, the damage would be beyond repair.

Stanley and Ted surveyed the wreck with grim faces.

"We have something to be thankful for, anyway," said the former. "The old tub is holding together."

"Yes, and everybody is here, safe and sound. While there is life there is hope. I guess we could be worse off at that," replied the latter, wringing the water out of his clothes.

"Right. And then again, we might still be sailing on peacefully toward Mollendo if it had not been for the storm. Better wait until we see what's left of the duffle before we decide just how we stand. *Carramba!* but that was a real storm. Looks like our troubles are beginning early in the game, but anyway, here's hoping none of them ends more seriously."

At this moment Captain Gonzales, followed by his bedraggled crew, came up from a point of rock from which they had been looking at the wreck.

"*Por dios,*" he wailed, "the boat, my *Buenaventura*, is lost, completely lost. Look at her, *señores!*

Oy, oy! Oy, oy!" and he wrung his hands in desperation.

The crew did not seem to be greatly worried over the loss of the ship. They seemed thankful to have escaped with their lives.

"It looks like we're all out of luck"—Stanley felt that something should be said to the assembled men—"but for heaven's sake, Gonzales, don't stand there and cry; it gets on my nerves. I am sorry your boat is lost, just as most or all of our things are lost too. We will help you out the best we can. Just now we can only wait until the sea goes down, and in the meantime we had better find out where we are."

"Suppose we walk along the shore," interrupted Ted. "There may be a village near by where we can get help if we need it later on. Stay with your men, skipper, and be ready for anything that turns up; perhaps Vicente had better go with us. If there are any people around, they will not understand English, nor much of our Spanish either, so Vicente can do the talking."

This being agreed upon, the two Americans, accompanied by Vicente, left the group whose duty it was to keep a lookout toward the sea, and made their way along the sandy strip of beach.

At first the walking was easy. Then they reached a rocky stretch where it was more difficult. Sea-grapes and cactus plants grew in clefts between the rocks nearest the water; further inland stood clusters of low bushes. This place had been chosen as a nesting site by vast colonies of pelicans, gulls, and terns; there were hundreds of them, especially of the first named. The little party clambered to the top of a low ridge, then stopped short in astonishment. The whole landscape, far as they could see, was covered with birds;

where there had been hundreds before, there were countless thousands now.

The pelicans seemed to cover the entire ground. Their nests were built in every conceivable spot—on rocks, in bushes, and on the ground. As the men walked among them, they paid no attention to the intruders into their rookery but stuck to their shallow stick platforms until nearly trodden upon; then they took heavily to the air, leaving two or three large white eggs exposed to the hot sunlight.

The gulls and terns were more wary. They flew up in clouds, screaming and squawking, until the air was filled with a circling, whirling mass of white bodies resembling giant snowflakes; some of them darted angrily at the heads of the men as if to strike savagely with beak and wings, but always at the last moment they veered aside and sped away.

While the pelicans had collected sticks and twigs for their nests, the other birds used only slight depressions in the sandy beach or the rough surfaces of narrow, rocky ledges; there they were packed so closely that it was impossible to walk without stepping on some of them. It was hard to understand how each pair of birds could ever find their own nest again when once they left it. Each contained from one to four pointed, speckled eggs; in a few of them were small, downy young.

Stanley and Ted were filled with wonder and amazement.

"Good heavens!" said the former. "Just look what we have stumbled into. I have read about such places but I never thought they really existed. It always sounded like nature-faking, to me."

"Same here," agreed Ted. "If we never find any-

thing else, the trip will have been worth while. Think of what the landlubbers miss who stick in the same place all their lives. They don't know anything about the outside world. A sight like this is worth a year of any man's life."

"And this is only the beginning, too. We are going to have a great trip, all right. I am glad I came; how about you?"

They had halted for a rest on a small, flat area where nests were so numerous that the brooding birds touched one another before they took wing. The little groups of speckled eggs fairly covered the sand.

"Look, *señor*," Vicente whispered excitedly, pointing to a large white-breasted gull with a grayish-blue back that was stealing cautiously back to its nest. They stood stock-still so as not to frighten the bird, and before long it had reached the depression that was apparently its own, and sat down on its spotted treasures. Then a curious thing happened. It reached over to a near-by nest and began rolling the eggs it contained into its own with its bill. When all three had been stolen, it started on another clutch, but by this time the rightful owners had returned; they looked in consternation at the empty little hollow, then stood up on their toes squawking and fluttering their wings in excitement. Then one settled down in the empty hollow while the other stood guard near by, doubtless patiently waiting for an opportunity to recover their eggs or to steal others from adjoining nests if the owners chanced to leave them.

Up to the present time it had seemed that they had been shipwrecked on the outer point of a peninsula that ran out into the sea a distance of many miles. As they reached the top of a hill, the highest on the

island, from which a good view of the surrounding country could be obtained, the truth of the situation came to them in a flash.

"Now we are up against it," said Ted in a quiet, serious voice. "This is an island."

For a moment Stanley said nothing; he merely looked at the brown, rugged mainland, a good five miles away, and at the intervening stretch of blue water.

"Well," he finally ventured, "I guess we can rig up a raft from the remains of the sloop, and if we can't do that some one will happen along to pick us up. There must be vessels of some kind or other plying along the coast."

The island upon which they found themselves stranded appeared to be about six miles long and varied in width from two to three miles. The greater part of it was sterile and occupied by the nesting sea-birds. At the far end, however, which was low and even, stood a clump of feathery palms, and mangrove thickets extended far out into the water.

"We might as well do a thorough job while we are about it. Suppose we go down to the grove," suggested Stanley.

"There is plenty of time, and nothing else to do," answered Ted. "Anyway, I have always wanted to see a real palm grove at close range, and to explore a mangrove thicket. We may not have another chance, as the mainland looks like a desert."

In half an hour they had reached the border of the thick, deep-green mass of vegetation. The land had sloped down very gently into a murky bank that lost itself in the water. This was a favorite spot for the salt-water-loving plants, for they stood in a solid,

tangled wall, their twisted, snakelike trunks entwined so closely that it was impossible to pass between them. The interlocking branches, covered with leaves, formed a canopy overhead through which the sunlight could not penetrate.

Vicente, who had tramped silently behind, now came forward brandishing the long knife he always carried in his belt.

"Very bad in there," he said, pointing to the mangroves, "but if the *señores* wish to go in I will cut a way. There are mosquitoes, crabs, lizards, snakes, and fever."

"Sure we want to go in," said Stanley eagerly. "We want to see all there is, and even the snakes and mosquitoes can't scare us."

Vicente plied the keen-edged blade with a dexterity known only to his kind. At each stroke, a stem the thickness of a man's wrist was cut in two; pushing them aside, he started into the dark thicket, stepping on the stumps. Boyle and Livingston followed close behind him.

They made their way slowly and carefully into the heart of the mangroves, balancing themselves by holding to the near-by stems. Everything seemed weird and unreal in the semidarkness, but soon their eyes became accustomed to the gloom, and then it was as if they had entered into another world.

The mangrove stems were alive with small crabs that scampered up and down as nimbly as minute squirrels, only they ran sidewise. When disturbed, they hurriedly scrambled down to the tangle of roots and disappeared in the water, but soon came out again, slowly and cautiously.

Snakes, green and mottled, clung to the lower

branches. Sometimes there were numbers of them together, coiled in a lump so that one wondered how they could ever untangle themselves again. Vicente said the spotted ones were deadly. He called them *mapanares*, and added that if a person were bitten by one of them he would become paralyzed and die within a few minutes. They did look formidable with their flat, arrow-shaped heads; the largest were about a yard long; and the men were careful not to come in contact with any of them.

A "*wush-wush*" above suddenly made them stop, and peering into the branches they saw cormorants and herons perched overhead. Many of them had taken wing, and from the noise they made there must have been thousands.

Rails darted about the roots. These queer birds had always interested Stanley. Their bodies are compressed, like a flea's, which enables them to slip easily through narrow passages in even the densest vegetation. Although their toes are long and slender, some species of the bird swim well; and their cackling and clucking never fails to be expressive of their mood. Stanley was to see and hear other and more interesting kinds before the end of his long journey.

Clouds of mosquitoes started up at their every step. They were of several sizes and colors, and the buzzing of their wings made a varied music. They bit ravenously and, as Stanley remarked, acted like wasps.

When Vicente had almost reached the outer edge of the mangroves, he stopped short and stared ahead with a look of intense terror. What he saw no doubt reminded him of the Solomon Islanders and the stories he had heard about their love for human flesh. Ted

and Stanley crept up cautiously to see what had attracted his attention.

Standing in the water up to his waist and but a few hundred feet away, was a negro of immense size. He was closely engaged in some occupation, apparently probing the deeper water ahead of him with a long stick.

The island was most irregular in form. A broken, crescent-shaped string of rocks ran out from beyond the end of the mangroves, enclosing a quiet expanse of water and forming a kind of lagoon. It also acted as a breakwater, which accounted for the vegetation. It was in the centre of this obstruction that the solitary black stood.

For some time the two Americans stared with a feeling of mingled curiosity and surprise. The same thought occurred to both at the same time.

"Can it be possible that the island is inhabited?" asked Ted.

"Perhaps so, but I am under the impression that if there is a village we should have seen it from the top of the hill."

"You're right. But this might be one of a group of islands, and the natives may live on some adjoining one. Perhaps we are further south than we thought."

"Cannibal," finally decided Vicente, who had not taken his eyes off the object of his fears the entire time. "I know. I've seen them before. There must be many and they will eat us."

Ted shot an amused glance at Stanley.

"I think you are right, Vicente," he said. "There is only one way for us to escape. We must catch this one before he sees us and runs away to tell the rest of the tribe we are here. Now, you hide behind the

point of rocks where he must pass on coming in from the water; as he goes by, leap upon him and hold him until we return with help from the——”

“No, señor,” wailed Vicente. “*Por todos los santos!* He would kill and eat me——”

“But you have your machete.”

“Look, señor, look: it is dull and broken from chopping the tough mangroves.”

“All right then,” said Stanley simply. “We’ll go with you and help you catch him.”

They retraced their steps to the land and then, sheltered by the band of vegetation, made their way to the place where the line of rocks joined the island.

They stood watching the negro for some time, but he was so busy with his occupation that he did not notice them. Even from a distance they could see that he was a giant in stature and of powerful build. His only article of clothing was a short skirt of grass or fibre of some kind. His hair was long and bushy, as was also his beard, so that he truly resembled a bushman.

They stood watching him a few minutes.

“Now, there are two ways of accounting for that fellow’s presence on this island,” said Stanley finally. “Either he has paddled over from the mainland or he is marooned here.”

“Came here to collect sea-birds’ eggs,” said Ted.

“Perhaps, but probably not. At any rate, he certainly is not collecting sea-birds’ eggs out there in the water.”

Just then the negro stopped short in his work and began to pull with all his might on the pole. A tussle followed. Back and forth he splashed in the shallow water, tugging and prying until the end of the stick,

with a large knob on it, had been dragged out of the water. This was evidently what he had been looking for, as he immediately shouldered the burden and headed for the shore.

Guessing his intention, the three watchers crouched behind a rock until the big black had arrived within a few yards of them; then they stood up suddenly and faced him. This unexpected event had a paralyzing effect on him. He stood stock-still and stared at them with eyes that started from their sockets.

Stanley was the first to break the silence.

"I don't know who you are," he began, "but if you will tell us how you got here it might help us to get away."

The negro was too dazed for words. For a moment he said nothing. Then, as his wits slowly returned, he dropped to his knees in the shallow water and mumbled something in a jargon they could not understand; he broke down and wept, and crawled up to them on hands and knees. All they could make out were words that he repeated continually and that sounded like "Two years, two years."

"I'll tell you what," said Stanley, turning to Ted. "He has been marooned on this island such a long time that he has forgotten how to talk. That does not look encouraging for us. Instead of helping us get away, we have one more to look out for."

"Surely," agreed Ted. "We cannot leave him here. Reminds me of Robinson Crusoe and Friday. But we saw this fellow first through the rushes, so I suppose we had better call him Moses." And "Moses" remained his name throughout the months that followed.

"Now we had better get back to see if anything

is left of the boat," continued Ted. "We are up against it. We must find some way of getting out of here or we shall all soon be like this man."

Motioning Moses to follow them, they started back toward the other end of the island.

Just before dusk, the party reached the point from which they had started. Captain Gonzales and his crew were sitting in a disconsolate little group. At sight of the negro they sprang to their feet.

"What news?" inquired the skipper excitedly.

"No news," replied Stanley, "except that we are on an island, and that we had better get busy if we ever expect to leave it."

"But the savage," he insisted. "Is the island inhabited? Where did you find him, and are there many of them?"

"No, he is the only one," answered Ted. "He is just a sample of what we will be like if we don't get a move on. Been here two years. Can't talk yet, but he is probably a survivor of some other shipwreck."

"Santos!" whined Gonzales. "What are we to do?"

"Man alive! haven't you an idea in the world? There is everything to do, right now. Can't you see that the tide is going out at a furious rate? Pretty soon the sloop will be high and dry on the rocks. Take your men and bring everything ashore that can be saved. Chop the planks out of her sides and deck, for we shall need them to make a raft; it's our only hope. Now, everybody, get busy."

With these words ringing in their ears, the entire party fell to work in earnest. A great rent in the vessel's hull showed that it would be impossible to repair her, even if she could be hauled off the rocks, which

was in itself out of the question. They waded through the gently rippling water, and while some clambered aboard the wreck the others waited to carry ashore the articles that could be saved, as rapidly as they were handed down to them.

At sight of the ship, Moses' eyes had brightened. It recalled to his rapidly clearing mind the misfortune that had been responsible for his own condition, and perhaps he also had visions of a change from the food on which he had been forced to subsist during his long exile. He quickly joined the line of men carrying boxes and water-soaked bags from the stranded sloop to the land. Stanley and Ted noted the eagerness with which he worked, carrying twice as much as the others and making more frequent trips.

"Stanley," said Ted, "Moses is the very man we need. Let's take him with us. No telling what may happen and we can always use him as our handy man."

"I was thinking the same thing," replied Stanley. "He is worth half a dozen of the others. We shall need some one to watch camp and help with the work. I had thought of Vicente because he is half Indian, and will know instinctively how to deal with the Indians we may meet in the interior. But Moses is certainly the man we need to do the general camp work."

They continued working late into the night. A tropical moon lighted up both land and sea with its silvery radiance, and a cool breeze soon dispersed the heat radiating from the sun-baked sand.

When everything had been carried ashore, including fresh water from the casks and a pile of boards and timbers for a raft, fires were lighted and soon a huge kettle of potatoes, onions, and tinned beef was bubbling itself into a savory stew. A half-hour later,

as they bent over their steaming bowls, the troubles and excitement of the day were all but forgotten. Moses ate everything that was given him with the appetite of a starving wolf, and when at the conclusion of the meal Vicente presented him with one of his long black cigars, his delight knew no bounds. He shouted and sang and did a kind of war-dance in the glare of the roaring fires.

Then they arranged themselves as comfortably as possible on the strip of sand, and soon they were sound asleep—all but Ted and Stanley, who sat up far into the night discussing the strange events of the day and making plans for the future. One thing puzzled them. From the few words of English he had spoken, they knew that Moses must have come originally from the West Indies. They knew that practically all of the West Indians were expert swimmers, capable of remaining in the water hours at a time; then, why had not Moses swum to the mainland rather than remain in solitary exile for such a long time on a desert island?

CHAPTER III

LIFE ON THE ISLAND. ENCOUNTER WITH A DEVIL-FISH

DAWN revealed the fact that an unusually high tide during the night had raised the *Buenaventura*, or rather what was left of her, off the rocks and bowled her over into the deeper water where she had sunk out of sight. It was fortunate indeed for the survivors that they had lost no time in rescuing their belongings, for now it was forever too late.

Stanley and Ted had planned their course of action the night before. The latter was to supervise the building of the raft, while the former inspected the outfit and provisions that lay piled in a heap on the sand.

Tools there were few. However, an abundance of ropes had been cut from the rigging, and with this they hoped to be able to lash the timbers together securely enough for the raft to withstand the trip to the mainland. Having had no experience in work of this kind, Ted went to Captain Gonzales for advice.

"The first thing to do is to carry the material to the other side of the island," said the captain.

"Thanks," said Ted simply; "and how long will that take?"

"Two or three days, at least. After that we must carry the cargo there too."

Ted saw immediately that he would have to rely on his own resources.

"I guess I can do better than that," he said. "How

about building the raft right here and then floating everything around? We can make several trips to the other end of the island and it will save all the carrying."

In the meantime Stanley was busying himself among the boxes and bags. The former, being water-proof, needed no attention, as they had not been crushed or broken. The bags, however, containing blankets, clothing, and a miscellaneous array of duffie, had become water-soaked, and all the articles had to be unpacked and spread in the sun to dry. The guns also required attention. The salt water had already attacked barrels and locks, which were covered with flecks of rust. All this took time. When, at the end of the second day, the job had been completed, the raft also was ready to be dragged into the water.

Moses hovered constantly about, helping first one and then the other. His power of speech was returning rapidly. Before long he was repeating whole sentences to himself, and after having rehearsed them a number of times he tried them on Ted and Stanley. They encouraged his attempts and, bit by bit, he told them how, years ago, he had left Barbados to work on the big ditch in the Canal Zone. When that was finished he had served aboard a steamer carrying guano from the guano islands off the Peruvian coast. One night the vessel had foundered in a gale; he clung to a bit of wreckage throughout the long hours of darkness, tossed about and buffeted by the giant waves. With the coming of dawn the ocean grew calmer; he was alone, but the sight of land near by gave him strength and hope, and he succeeded in reaching the island. There he had lived, more than two years he thought, although probably his account of the time was not accurate.

Food was abundant on the island. There were crabs and cocoanuts, besides the sea-birds and their eggs. The water teemed with fish. A large pot-hole near the cocoanut grove always contained fresh water, so, taken in all, the negro had not fared badly.

The loneliness of the island, however, was terrible. Day after day, month after month, went by until all hope of rescue was gone. Steamers and sailing vessels were seen frequently on the horizon, but they remained well out at sea, never venturing near the treacherous, rock-bound coast. So the castaway had become reconciled to his fate, and had settled down to his solitary mode of existence.

Toward the middle of the third day, the two Americans accompanied Moses to his abode among the palms. Nestling snugly in the shade of the tall, graceful trees was a low hut that from a distance resembled a small haystack. A closer view showed that it was made entirely of palm-leaves placed layer upon layer over a framework of poles, so that it was perfectly water-proof. A hole in one side served as an entrance.

The ground was strewn with heaps of egg-shells, broken cocoanuts, and the remains of fish, crabs, and water-fowl.

A fireplace of rocks had been built near the hut; formerly it had been watched faithfully and the smouldering embers had never been allowed to die down, for that would have meant a diet of raw meat, the last of the few matches he had saved from his water-soaked clothing having been expended. Now there was only a pile of cold, powdery ashes.

Ranged along the exterior of the hut was a queer assortment of implements. There were long, forked sticks cut from the mangroves. Large clam-shells with

keen, cutting edges took the place of knives. And a heap of cocoanut fibre showed the source from which Moses had obtained the material for his only article of clothing.

Ted's attention was attracted by a number of pink conch shells that had been laid in a row in front of the hut. These, Moses explained, were his calendar. He had placed one in the row for each full moon, but frequently the hermit-crabs made an inroad on them and carried them down to the beach; they made ideal homes for the crabs, which were always stealing some object in which to hide. Although the missing shells had been replaced as soon as their loss had been discovered, Moses admitted that his method of keeping track of time was open to question. Twenty-eight remained, representing that many months and the length of the negro's sojourn on the island.

"Now let's take a look inside the igloo," suggested Ted. "If it were made of snow instead of palm-leaves, it would look just like an Esquimau hut."

"Oh, that's only a slight difference," retorted Stanley in a lofty manner. "It is only a little over six thousand miles from the equator to the north pole."

"You know what I mean. It reminds me of an igloo because it has the same shape."

"Yes, and because it is so different in every other way! I see."

The hole that served as a doorway was so low that they had to stoop to get inside. It was stifling-hot and so dark that they could see nothing, but Moses produced a lamp made of half a cocoanut-shell and filled with fish-oil. Ted struck a match and applied the flame to the fibre wick; then the interior of the hut was lighted up by the sputtering, yellow blaze.

The first thing they saw was a raised platform covered with a thick layer of dry leaves; this, they rightly surmised, was Moses' bed, raised above the ground in order to be out of reach of the crabs and other creeping things that infested the island.

A pile of fish-nets lay on the neatly swept floor, and wicker fish-traps that resembled long, cone-shaped baskets hung from the centre pole. There were also fish-spears tipped with pieces of clam-shells that had been chipped to a sharp point and had barbs on each side.

"Let's get out," said Ted. "I should think you would roast in there. Why don't you sleep outside?"

"The nights is very cold, suh," Moses reminded him, "and it nearly always rains."

"Two very good reasons for staying indoors. And how about the fire when it rains?"

"I carry it inside. When they's ile I keep the lamp going all night, too."

"Say, those cocoanuts look very tempting." Stanley changed the subject, casting longing glances at the huge clusters of deep-green nuts dangling sixty feet above their heads. "I have never tasted one fresh from the tree in my life."

"I will cut some for the señores," said Vicente. "The milk is very good, but the meat—it will give you fever if you eat it."

Vicente began laboriously to shin up one of the smooth, columnlike trunks. Moses watched him a moment, scorn plainly outlined on his dusky face.

"Them is too green," he said, pointing to the bunch toward which Vicente was painfully making his way. "These is much better. I will show you how we gathers them in Barbados."

So saying, he placed a keen-edged clam-shell between his teeth and started up a tree almost as nimbly as a monkey. He grasped the straight trunk with his hands, then, placing his large, broad feet against it at right angles, he calmly walked to the top and seated himself among the bases of the giant, feathery leaves forming the umbrellalike top of the tree.

"Watch out down there below," he shouted as he began sawing at the tough stems. Soon the weighty nuts began to crash to the ground. What queer-looking objects they were! Neither Stanley nor Ted had ever seen anything like them. They were fully four times the size of those sold in stores at home, and were green, and triangular in shape like a beechnut.

By this time Vicente had reached the top of his tree and was hacking away at the largest it held. Moses slid down to the ground and, picking up one of the nuts, sawed off one end in a dexterous, businesslike manner.

"The husk is very thick," he commented, "and all made up of layers of tough fibre." Before long he had exposed the brown nut with three eyes showing in the shell. It was an easy matter to perforate one of these with a stick, when the sweet, milky juice bubbled out. He handed it to Ted and then prepared another one for Stanley. They drank and found the milk delicious and refreshing—so much so, in fact, that both Moses and Vicente were kept busy providing them with fresh nuts as rapidly as they could be opened.

After a while Moses disappeared, only to return shortly carrying an armful of the nuts from which the husks had been removed and which had begun to sprout.

"You kin eat the meat of these," he explained. "When they sprout, the meat is very sweet."

Upon cracking one open, they found the interior of the shell filled with a spongy white mass that tasted like a good quality of cocoanut candy.

"This is great," cried Ted enthusiastically. "I wouldn't mind being Robinson Crusoe myself if it were on this island. No wonder Moses looks anything but starved to death. Now, what else have you got to eat? The first course was excellent, and now for something that sticks to the ribs."

"They's lots of sea-cats in the rocks," said Moses, "and sea-eggs in the cove. Fishin's been mighty pore but mebbe we kin ketch a snapper. If we cain't, they's lots of crabs for a callaloo."

The latter statement was true. The ground was honeycombed with holes; in the entrance to each sat a good-sized crab. When the men stood still, the creatures came out a distance of several yards, and standing upright on the tips of their feet waved their horns or feelers excitedly.

Moses gathered up several of the short, forked sticks standing against the hut, and a quantity of fishing-tackle, and led the party to a little, rockbound cove a quarter of a mile away. To their questioning what a sea-cat was, he could offer no explanation other than that it was just a "sea-cat," all arms and legs.

Arrived at their destination, the negro gave one of the forked sticks to each of them, and instructed them to wade out into the shallow water and poke among the crevices between the rocks. When a sea-cat took hold, they could feel it, and must then pull it up out of the water. In the meantime he busied himself unwinding the fishing-lines, to each of which

was attached a strong hook of mother-of-pearl. When he had finished, he joined the two Americans, who had stripped and entered the clear, warm water, having first assured themselves that there were no sharks in the vicinity.

Not to be outdone, Vicente followed their example. It was noticeable that a strong rivalry was springing up between the giant negro and the short, tawny Ecuadorian, which threatened to reach serious proportions in the not far distant future. Each tried to outdo the other when it came to showing off his prowess.

The four men explored the submerged little caverns carefully with their forked sticks, stepping cautiously on the uneven, rocky bottom, and going constantly further away from the shore until the water was up to their shoulders.

Suddenly Moses dived, and through the crystal water they could follow his movements as he swam along rapidly, jabbing his stick into each crevice and grotto that might serve as a hiding-place for his quarry. After a minute he came up for a fresh supply of air, then down he went again with a splash.

The others tried to follow his example, and Vicente immediately showed that he was as much at home under the water as Moses; but it was hard work for the Americans, groping among the slimy rocks without any definite idea of what they were looking for.

After a quarter of an hour's work, Stanley came up just in time to see Vicente streaking toward the beach; he was also yelling at the top of his voice. Ted emerged an instant later, sputtering and gasping, and battling for life with something that seemed to be trying to drag him underneath the water.

Stanley lost no time in getting to his companion's

side, and Moses too was swimming rapidly in his direction. As he neared the spot, Stanley noticed that the water surrounding Ted was inky-black. Both he and Moses reached the struggling man at the same time, and grasping him tried to drag him from the clutches of whatever was pulling him down. Instead of freeing him, they themselves became enmeshed in a maze of living, darting things that wound about their legs, and exerting a powerful force began to draw them under. In vain they fought and struggled, now with heads above the water, now entirely submerged and in the blackness of night.

It was then that Vicente arrived on the scene, although unobserved by the three nearly exhausted men. They suddenly felt a relaxation of the writhing cables that bound their limbs, and freeing themselves made for the shore, Stanley and Moses helping Ted, who was barely conscious. Vicente followed soon after, dragging behind him a long, quivering object that resembled a snake of large proportions; when he drew it out upon the beach they saw that it was the tentacle of an octopus.

Ted was bleeding in a number of places and his face was white and drawn with pain, so Moses hurriedly went in search of a remedy that he said would ease the trouble. He returned soon after with a section of cactus plant and, splitting one of the spiny, tongue-shaped leaves, applied the juice to the wounds. Relief followed almost instantly.

Their attention was then attracted to Vicente, who was sitting on the sand vainly trying to pry loose a clam which had closed on several of his toes, and held him as firmly as a steel trap. After Stanley had unsuccessfully tried to loosen the large bivalve, Moses

came to the rescue and, with Vicente's knife, cut the two muscular hinges that held the halves together, when they dropped off instantly. The Ecuadorian's foot was not injured in the least.

Moses was greatly disturbed over the whole happenings, and hastened to explain that he had never seen a sea-cat of that size in the cove. He had caught dozens of them for food, but they were always small ones. The large ones lived among the rocks beyond the mangroves, and a long stick was used to catch them, but even there he had never run across one half the size of their attacker.

"Well, all I have to say," said Ted weakly, "is that I have done all the sea-cat fishing I intend in some time. Nobody will have to explain to me what a sea-cat is, either. All I wish is that I could have a good look at the one that nearly got us."

"From the size of that one tentacle, it must be a monster," said Stanley.

"I will get him for the señores," Vicente volunteered.

"No, indeed! don't go near the spot. We have had all we can take care of in one afternoon. Even if it is pretty sick from the loss of one of its arms, I have an idea the octopus still has enough fight left to handle one of us without overexerting itself," Stanley protested.

"But he is dead," persisted Vicente. "The only way to deal with a devil-fish is to kill him—or he will kill you. If the negro will come along, I think the two of us can drag him out for the señores to look at."

"Very well; go ahead if you want to, but don't take any chances."

The two made their way out to the spot, slowly and cautiously, and then after assuring themselves that the creature was really dead they began to tow it to the land. On account of its great weight, it was impossible for them to haul it out on the beach, but they succeeded in reaching the very shallow water where it could be examined without trouble.

What a monster it was! The tentacles, that still writhed convulsively, must have measured at least twelve feet from tip to tip, and but seven remained, one having been hacked off in the encounter. Each one was armed with rows of murderous sucking disks which enabled the octopus to hold tight to its victims after encircling them with its snaky arms. In the centre, from which the tentacles sprang like branches on a tree, was the small, baggy body; also the large head with the two huge, unblinking eyes. One of the things that interested them greatly was the creature's mouth—a wicked beak shaped like a parrot's, only many times as large. It had drooped open now, indicating that life had fled.

"This is the ink-sack," said Vicente, pointing to a portion of the repulsive body. "When attacking, these fish always discharge a large quantity of black fluid into the water; the sudden darkness confuses their prey and prevents it from fighting back."

"I see," said Ted. "That accounts for the blackness of the water around me just before the arms got me by the feet. Ugh! I have seen enough of it. If you have any more surprises like this up your sleeve, Moses, please don't spring them so suddenly."

The negro began to repeat his apologies and explanations, but Ted cut him short.

"It's all right. Don't worry," he said. "Now that

it's over with, I think it was pretty good fun, and I have learned what a sea-cat is like, anyway."

"I suppose you will never forget it, either," added Stanley.

They now baited some of the hooks Moses had brought with pieces of clam-meat, and cast the lines into a deep hole at the base of a giant rock.

Scarcely had the tempting morsel sunk out of sight when the fish began to strike, with tremendous force, but the heavy tackle soon tired them out, and they could be hauled up without trouble. Before many minutes had passed, three beautiful red snappers lay gasping on the rock. They were somewhat like a bass, only more slender, and each fish measured eighteen inches in length. Their color was a deep red.

The Americans were surprised at the ease with which they could be caught, and continued fishing until an even dozen had been taken from the water. This was more than they could use at one time, but Vicente assured them that the fish could be smoke-cured in a way that would preserve them perfectly and would add to their flavor; and also, that it would be wise to lay up a small store of them for use in the future in case of emergency.

"We might catch a few more," suggested Stanley, "as they are so plentiful and so easy to get. We ought to live on the country whenever possible, and save our tinned provisions, as they will keep until needed."

"Yes, and it's good fun catching them, too," said Ted. "I will go for more clams for bait. There isn't much left of the one Vicente caught on his foot."

He made his way around to the sandy strip of beach and before long returned with two of the bivalves.

"Here is enough bait to last a whole day," he an-

nounced as he threw them down on the rock, for these were not the ordinary clams found in the streams and ponds of North America. Each one was over a foot in diameter.

Taking Vicente's knife, he cut them open. As the two halves of the second one came apart, a small object rolled out on the rocks. To his amazement, he saw that it was a pearl twice the size of a buckshot, apparently perfect in shape and of a shimmering white color.

"Look, look!" he shouted to Stanley, holding the precious object in the palm of his hand. "A pearl—and such a pearl. Why, man alive! It's the most beautiful one I have ever seen, and it must be worth a fortune."

For a moment Stanley was speechless.

"Some people have all the luck in the world," he said dryly.

"You don't call being grabbed by an octopus luck, do you?" asked Ted.

"I said *all* the luck, didn't I? That includes bad luck as well as good. Anyway, that certainly is a beauty and we ought to give it a name. Now, what shall we call it?"

"How would Queen of the Sea sound?" suggested Ted.

"Not bad, but the name should have something to do with our trip."

"I have it," said Ted. "Star of the Inca. We will carry it with us for luck."

"That's a splendid idea. Where there is one pearl there must be others. No more fishing for me. I am going to turn into a pearl-hunter right now and keep it up until I find enough for a whole necklace."

"It won't be no use," advised Moses, who had been greatly interested in the find. "The whole time I been here I ain't seen no puhl and I ketched mo' clams than would fill a ship."

They paid no attention to his admonition, but raced down to the cove and began to look for clams. One after another they tossed them out on the beach. When several dozen had been collected, they began opening them, carefully examining each one. As the work progressed, their enthusiasm and hopes diminished, and in the end the search proved fruitless.

The sun was dipping low into the ocean by this time, so it was decided to return immediately to the spot where the sailors were awaiting them. Vicente and Moses insisted on carrying all the fish, and the latter also carried a piece of the dead octopus.

Ted had his precious pearl tied safely in one corner of his handkerchief; he could think of little else. It even overshadowed his memory of the encounter with the devil-fish.

In passing Moses' hut Stanley gathered up as many cocoanuts as he could carry. Then the party started for home as rapidly as possible.

The walk was long and tiresome, and darkness had set in long before they reached their goal. However, a bright fire, over which the sailors were cooking supper, guided them straight to the spot.

To their delight, they found that a hot meal awaited them. The men had succeeded in capturing a sea-turtle, and its flesh, chopped into small pieces and mixed with salt, pepper, and onions, had been fried in the concave shell of the creature. In addition there were tinned biscuit and coffee.

When every one had eaten his fill, the fish were

cleaned and placed to roast on a framework of sticks under which a heap of glowing embers had been raked from the fire. Vicente turned them occasionally, and was still engaged in this work when the others sought the warmth of their blankets.

The day had been an eventful one for Ted and Stanley, especially the former. They were thoroughly tired, but the happenings of the last few hours had been as exciting as they were strange, and it was some time before they could banish them from their minds; then they fell into a fitful slumber.

Ted was back at the cove, sprawled on the sand near the edge of the water. Out of the blue depths came a stately procession of clams—big clams, little clams, in fact, clams of all sizes and shapes, and as they passed him each deposited a wonderful pearl by his side. With the fleeting moments their number grew until they were legions; the heap of pearls mounted higher and higher; he tried to move, but his limbs felt heavy as lead and pinned him to the spot. Still they came, in hundreds and in thousands. The pearls were covering him up—smothering him—but he could not get away. How he hated them! how valueless they were after all! If they would only take them back into the briny deep and leave them where they rightfully belonged, instead of crushing out his life. Their shimmer, their lustre, but masked their oppressive weight. Alas! it would soon be too late.

As for Stanley, he too was back at the cove, slowly and painfully picking his way over the uneven bottom, fathoms and fathoms down in the sea. A forest of coral with wide-spreading branches towered above him. Some were pink, some yellow, but most of the trees were of a grayish-white color. High overhead and

through the interlacing masses he could see the reflection of the surface of the water shimmering like a green mirror. Strange and terrible creatures were all about him. Sea-serpents hundreds of feet long twined their coils around the gnarled trunks and drooped in living festoons from the limbs. Giant spiders, and lobsters the size of horses, with great, wabbling eyes stuck on the ends of lengthy feelers, surveyed him in eager anticipation of a good meal. Sharks swam past, grinning horribly and exposing rows of white, daggerlike teeth. He looked for a place in which to hide, and, spying the entrance of a black cavern, made for it. Just as he was about to step inside, a mass of tentacles reached out, gripped him firmly with a strangling hold, and pulled him into the darkened interior.

Both the dreamers awoke at the same instant and with a start. A brisk wind had sprung up and had blown the sand over them until they were nearly buried under its suffocating weight. Unearthing themselves, they moved their blankets to a higher spot among the rocks and soon were sound asleep.

CHAPTER IV

THE DASH FOR THE MAINLAND. ATTACKED BY SHARKS

THE members of the little party were up and stirring just as the first, rosy streaks of dawn appeared above the frowning, black mainland to the east, for, on this memorable day the journey from the island was to begin. The water was smooth as glass; a school of porpoise were dashing about and jumping, a half-mile out, seemingly in thorough enjoyment of their morning exercise, or perhaps they were breakfasting on mackerel or some other member of the finny tribe that kept beneath the surface. Sea-birds, in myriads, screamed and fluttered overhead, and lines of stately pelicans were already spread out in semicircular formation on the shallow fishing-banks.

For breakfast, the men had great, flaky pieces of the snappers caught the day before, and both Ted and Stanley pronounced them the best fish in the world. Moses brought chunks of "sea-cat" arms that had been boiling throughout the night, but one taste was sufficient to convince the Americans that the tough, leathery morsels were not to their liking. Even Moses preferred the snappers, but assured them that the "calaloo" he would prepare for lunch would receive a more hearty reception.

It took all hands to pry the heavy raft off the bed of sand and slide it into the water. It was fully twenty feet long and eight feet wide, and capable of carrying

considerable weight; in fact, two trips, they thought, would take them and their belongings to the mainland. To load the craft and firmly lash the bags and boxes into place was the work of but half an hour. Stanley, with six men at the oars, was to make the first trip. They kept close to the shore, rowing where the water was deep and poling where it was shallow. In this manner they reached the opposite side of the island in less than two hours' time. After unloading the cargo, all of the men but Stanley and Moses returned for Ted and the remainder of the outfit, and by eleven o'clock the second load had arrived.

In the meantime, Moses had gone on a crabbing expedition; he returned with a long string of the crustaceans in one hand and a bundle of seaweed in the other, just as the raft was being moored to the shore. A fire was soon kindled and the largest pot in the outfit was set to boil; when the water was scalding hot, the crabs and seaweed, having been first thoroughly washed, were dropped into it; salt and pepper were added later, and at the end of half an hour a thick green soup was ready to be served to the hungry crowd. This was the calaloo Moses had promised them. Everybody pronounced the concoction delicious, and cast longing glances at the pot long after the last particles had been scraped out of the bottom. So far the party had fared splendidly; it was well that they had, for lean days were approaching in the not far distant future, when they should often recall this land of plenty with its varied delicacies that could be had for the mere gathering.

After this short stop, the loaded raft started on the long voyage to the coast. It had been arranged that Ted would go in charge of this load while Stanley re-

mained to superintend the taking over of the second cargo. A hasty "So long and good luck," the line was loosened, the oars dipped and swung in slow rhythm, and the raft clumsily wallowed into deep water and headed for the distant shore. The small sail that had been provided was hoisted, but there was not wind enough to bulge the sagging canvas.

Those who remained behind watched the departing craft with doubts and misgivings. What if it should founder and sink with those on board? This thought kept Stanley from pondering upon his own position, which was far from enviable, for in the event of a mishap, his party would remain stranded on the lonely isle for years, or perhaps even for life if no stray bark chanced along to rescue them.

However, it seemed as if all was going well with the raft. Further and further it withdrew from the island. Stanley did not relax his vigil for an instant. Before long he realized that the distance was greater than they had supposed, and it was not until late in the afternoon that he had the satisfaction of seeing the craft, now but a black speck on the water, disappear into what he judged must be a protected little inlet that would afford a safe landing-place.

With a sigh of relief he turned from his long watch, to discover that he was alone. This did not trouble him in the least. Moses, accompanied by the remaining sailors, had probably gone on a foraging expedition and would return in due time. This surmise proved to be all too true. After a short time, the little party returned, bowed down under the heavy weight of burdens that they carried on their backs. When they deposited their loads near the fireplace, it was obvious that they had made an inroad on the nesting bird

colony; each man brought about half a bushel of snowy pelican eggs. They had made baskets of cocoanut leaves which were filled to overflowing. At first Stanley was amused; then he was dismayed.

"What in the world are you going to do with all those eggs?" he demanded of Moses, who stood grinning with delight as if he had accomplished a noteworthy deed and expected words of approbation.

"Eat 'um," he answered. "They is very good eating, suh."

"Yes, I don't doubt that. But why did you bring so many? We couldn't eat all those eggs in a month."

"They's lots of them," replied Moses unconcernedly. "So we brought a plenty."

"And you are going to take them back a plenty quick, too," Stanley ordered. He fully believed in the righteousness of using for food any of the natural products and animals they might discover, when necessary. Whether fruits, game, fish, or sea-birds' eggs, it was just and proper to collect and use them if they were needed; but the sight of this wanton destruction raised his anger to the fighting point.

"Take them back," he repeated, "and distribute them among the nests from which they were taken. These we will keep," he continued, taking several dozen from the nearest basket, "because we need them; the others go back where they came from. Now, get a move on."

Stanley had taken them completely by surprise. Before they fully appreciated what had happened, they were trudging back to the rookery carrying their heavy baskets on their backs. Arrived there, Stanley watched the distribution of the eggs into the nests of their outraged owners. "A nice mess there will be

when the eggs begin to hatch," he thought to himself, as he watched the indiscriminate distribution. Of course, it was not possible to tell which eggs belonged together in any one nest, as they all looked alike, so the best they could do was to place two or three in each stick platform and let it go at that. Doubtless, he thought, some of the eggs will hatch sooner than others, and a fine chance the smaller fellows will have in competing with their larger and stronger step-brothers.

After they had returned to the beach, Stanley made a discovery that settled the doubts in his mind. Moses was breaking a number of eggs that he intended using for supper, when Stanley found that they were all perfectly fresh. "I hope the eggs you took back are all as fresh as these," he said.

"Oh, yes, suh!" Moses hastened to assure him. "When the eggs is not puhfickly new-laid, they looses their white color and turns a kind of gray-like. I kin tell them a mile away." Apparently the negro had learned many things during his involuntary exile.

The evening was a long and lonely one. A bright fire had been kindled near the water's edge to guide the raft back to the spot in the event that it returned during the night, which was not probable. Stanley wondered how his companion was faring and what new discoveries he had made in the strange land that had just been reached. The sailors had long since sought the warmth of their blankets, so until midnight Stanley kept his solitary watch with only the brilliant stars overhead to keep him company. How wonderfully bright they were, and how great their number! There was the Big Dipper, just visible above the horizon, and there, almost directly above, flamed

the Southern Cross, that remains forever unseen by the multitudes who never journey to the vicinity of the equator. Shooting stars or meteorites were numerous; every few minutes one streaked its fiery way across the heavens and then disappeared into the blackness.

From time to time Stanley piled more wood on the fire, always keeping it blazing brightly in the hope that it might serve as a guiding beacon to the returning raft. The night air was chill and a heavy dew saturated his clothing. A drowsiness stole over him that was hard to combat, but he remained faithfully at his post. At midnight he called two of the men, and after giving them minute instructions as to their duty, he turned into his blankets and was soon fast asleep. It seemed as if he had scarcely closed his eyes when something occurred that made him sit bolt upright, wide awake. The fire had died down to a bed of dully glowing embers and from a near-by point in the darkness came the sound of deep breathing as of men in sleep. The watchers had fallen asleep; no other sound disturbed the chill silence of the night. Stanley was sure, however, that something unusual had brought him to his senses so suddenly, and listened intently for a repetition of the sound. He had not long to wait. A faint hallooing came from across the black expanse of water, so jumping to his feet he hurriedly piled wood on the fire and fanned it into flame. The calls were repeated now at frequent intervals and constantly drew nearer. That could mean but one thing: the raft was returning. Overjoyed, he awakened the sleepers and together they kept the fire roaring until, an hour later, the raft bearing three men had touched the shore and been tied up to a snag.

Stanley plied the men with numerous questions.

Had every one and everything been landed safely? What kind of place was it, and were there inhabitants on the coast? They replied that the voyage had been easy indeed, but as to the country—it was a barren, desert waste. Then one of them recalled that he had brought a letter from Ted, and fishing it out of his hat he delivered it to the hands that eagerly reached out to grasp it. Stanley unfolded the paper and read:

“DEAR STANLEY:

“The trip across was nothing to write home about. The men I am sending back know just where we are, but anyway, head into the little opening to the right of the tallest red cliff which you will plainly see as you near the coast. Once inside the cove, you will see us. Country is all sandy and desert-like and not a soul about. Bring all the drinking water you can, there is none here, and come over with the tide.

“In haste,

“TED.”

After a light lunch, the men, at Stanley's command, lay down to sleep. Rowing the heavy raft to the mainland and back again had been a severe tax on their endurance, and they were glad of the opportunity to rest before starting on the next and last trip.

With the first streaks of dawn, Moses and one of the sailors who had remained behind were despatched to the pot-hole near the cocoanut grove for water. They carried all the pots, calabashes, and canteens possessed by the party. The other men began to load the raft. By the time the water-carriers returned, the tide was rising rapidly, so they lost no time in casting loose and starting for the distant shore. Small waves were breaking over the heavy timbers of the raft, but un-

less the sea roughened considerably, there was no reason for alarm.

The most joyful man in the party was Moses. His hair had been trimmed by one of the sailors, and Ted had presented him with suitable clothing, a razor, and a kit of toilet articles. At last he was leaving his island home, after two years of involuntary exile from the outer world. He laughed and shouted and sang, until one of the sailors hinted to Stanley that the negro acted as if he had gone *loco*.

The tide was of considerable assistance to them; also, there was breeze enough to fill the sail. At noon, Stanley judged over half the distance had been covered; but now the flood had stopped and they must depend upon oars and sail for the remainder of the way. Luckily, the shoreward breeze held out, but before long this had stiffened, kicking up a sea that made rough sailing. The raft was continuously awash, and the only thing that prevented the loss of the cargo was the fact that it had been firmly lashed into place.

Suddenly Stanley noticed a fleeting, dark form in the water, like the shadow of a passing cloud; soon there followed another. However, one glance at the sky reassured him that there was not a fleck of vapor in the clear blue overhead. Then the surface of the water was cut by a black object not unlike the periscope of a submarine, leaving a streak of white foam in its wake.

"Sharks!" yelled Moses at the same instant. "Look, look! there's a million of 'em all around us. Tiger-sharks! Heaven help us all."

Stanley felt an uncanny feeling creeping up his spine as he now beheld numbers of the fleeting black forms

circling around the wallowing raft. Occasionally there was a flash of white in their midst as one of the frightful creatures turned swiftly on its back in position to attack. With each passing minute their number increased, as did also their boldness. Soon the hungry horde was dashing back and forth not five yards away and they could clearly distinguish the thick, blunt heads and the wicked little eyes, also the rapidly moving fins and tail. When one turned quickly on its back and opened the low-set jaw, rows upon rows of sharp white teeth were plainly exposed to view.

The sailors were almost paralyzed with fear, but, while Stanley felt far from comfortable, he could not quite understand why there should be any special danger so long as the raft held together. However, should the constant mauling of the waves prove too great a strain for the lashings—he hated to think of the fate that awaited them.

In the meantime the ravenous horde continued its ceaseless vigil, their number growing constantly larger, while momentarily the circles grew smaller and smaller. Suddenly one of the largest sharks made a frantic dash at the raft. Onward it came, at terrific speed, its dorsal fin cutting the water with a hissing noise. The men set up a cry of terror and clung to anything that offered a hold, in anticipation of the shock of collision. But it never came. The monster swerved easily and gracefully just in the nick of time, turned over, and with a flash of white, was gone. Others followed the cue of their leader. It was now certain that the sharks meant to attack in earnest. Singly and in groups they rushed at the clumsy, staggering platform of boards that separated them from their victims. They grew so bold as to graze the edges of

the raft, and each shock caused a quiver of horror to sweep over the frightened sailors.

"We must fight them," yelled Stanley at the top of his voice. "Grab your oars and when one gets within reach, let him have it on the head."

Setting the example, he seized the handle of an oar and the next shark to rush at them received a powerful blow. This had the effect of causing it to dive immediately. Seeing the result of Stanley's tactics, the men followed his lead and soon the heavy butt-ends of the oars were falling like flails upon the heads of the attacking mob. Action, also, to a large extent cleared the men's minds of fear and before long they had lost their timidity and were fighting for their very lives.

The onslaught of the men, however, had no permanent effect on the sharks. The savage creatures determined not to lose the meal so nearly within their reach, and continued the frantic rushes. It was then that Vicente put into practical use the knowledge he had gained during his sojourn in the South Sea Islands. Without a word, he quickly slipped his clothing and dived directly underneath the nearest shark; there was a frantic splashing and floundering and Vicente's head bobbed up beside the raft, where eager hands pulled him aboard. The thrashing continued and the water assumed a crimson tinge; maddened by the taste of blood, the sharks fell upon their wounded companion and devoured him before the eyes of the astonished men. Vicente had temporarily staid the danger by taking the offensive; by unexpectedly diving at the approaching shark he had taken it completely by surprise, and before the startled creature

could turn he had passed beneath it and had delivered a telling thrust into its stomach with his knife. Being acquainted with the habits of tiger-sharks, he knew that the others would immediately attack and tear to pieces any one of their number that became disabled and was unable to defend itself.

The strong wind was steadily blowing the raft shoreward, and although the frenzied, fighting sharks had been left behind, Vicente, with knife in hand, stood poised for another dive in the event that they returned to the onslaught. Their only chance of safety lay in keeping their attackers engaged in devouring one another.

Gradually, Stanley noticed a change in the color of the water; a light turquoise replaced the deep blue of the stretch they had just traversed. The sailors, noticing it at the same time, set up a shout of joy. It meant that shallow water had been reached and that their ravenous pursuers would now be compelled to give up the chase. With warm words of approbation for Vicente for his heroic action, the men bent to their oars and headed toward the entrance of the cove plainly outlined in the distance.

It was late afternoon when they wearily pulled up to the beach, where Ted awaited them. In the failing light, Stanley could see only a vast belt of dry sand stretching between the ocean and the tremendous wall of grayish mountains amid whose rock-bound fastnesses reposed the treasure of a once powerful nation. To wrest the secret from the sphinx-like masses of stone and earth seemed like no easy undertaking; but there was no turning back, even had they so desired, for behind them lay only the boundless expanse

of water; before again embarking upon its restless bosom they would have seen and heard that which had baffled the prying efforts of the seekers of the treasure for half a thousand years.

CHAPTER V

THE LONE HUT IN THE DESERT. THE RING

"THE thing for us to do," said Ted early the next morning, "is to move on as rapidly as possible. We can gain nothing by staying here. The question, though, is, which way shall we go?"

"That's easy," Stanley replied. "The coast, up and down, far as we can see, is sandy and desert like just as it is here. I have read that it never rains in this part of Peru. The high mountains stop the rain-clouds coming from the east, and the winds blowing from the snow-covered peaks meet the clouds coming from the sea and cause them to hold their moisture. We might travel up or down the coast hundreds of miles without finding water, and we can't put back to sea; so the only thing to do is strike toward the mountains. There must be water there from the melting snow up above, and where there is water there is life. What do you say to following the little ravine just below here that leads inland?"

"That seems like the only plan. Our supply of water will not last over a day, so we had better start right away."

There now arose the problem of re-sorting the outfit and arranging the articles they were to take with them into packs, one of which each man was to carry. Only the most necessary things were taken; these included the two rifles, camera and photographic supplies, a blanket and change of clothing each, and food.

Strips two inches wide were cut from the canvas sail to use as tump-lines.

Although the work of arranging the packs was done with all possible speed, it was late afternoon when the little party started on the difficult march up the dry gully toward the hazy, dark mountains stretching north and south in front of them in an unbroken mass. Walking through the deep sand was tiresome work, but no one complained, for each man realized that his only hope of salvation lay in reaching some more hospitable spot without delay.

At first the mountains had appeared to be at no very great distance from the coast, but, although they travelled steadily for four hours directly toward the towering wall, they seemed no nearer than when they had first started.

The first thing Ted did after a halt for the night had been called, was to take charge of the remaining supply of water. It had become sadly depleted. On account of the great heat the men had called for drink frequently during the march, and it had been impossible to refuse them, even though both Ted and Stanley knew that the limited supply must be used sparingly. A small amount was now doled out to each man. Then they set to work digging in the bed of the dry water-course they had been following, in the hope of encountering an underground rivulet. After several deep holes had been scooped in the sand they saw that further efforts in that direction would be useless. Their only hope lay in pushing ahead without loss of time.

Long before daybreak of the following morning, the party again started on its way. There was no change in the nature of the country through which they passed. Not a speck of green found sustenance in that

parched and hostile desert. There was only mile after mile of sandy waste without sign of any living thing, and the mountains, mirage like, seemed to remain always in the unattainable distance. Still they trudged onward, slowly and painfully. During the stop for the noonday lunch another attempt was made to find water by digging in the sand, but to no avail. Their canteens and calabashes were now all but empty.

"This is getting terrible," Ted confided to Stanley. "We can't go on like this much longer."

"I have been thinking," Stanley replied, "that if we find a sheltered spot we ought to lay up for the rest of the day and travel at night to avoid the heat."

"But there are no trees, not even a cactus, so how can we expect to find shade?"

"The gully is growing deeper all of the time, and we may be able to find a spot where the walls will afford protection. This looks like a good place right here."

They ordered the men down into a great rent torn by the rushing water during the season of storms among the tall peaks. The high walls cast long, slanting shadows that provided a welcome respite from the scorching sunlight, and a slight breeze moving through the cleft ventilated it comfortably. There they spent the remaining hours of daylight, writhing in agony from the burning thirst.

With the coming of dusk they once more resumed the seemingly endless march. As darkness drew on, the temperature dropped appreciably. But for the fact that they walked rapidly and were burdened with the heavy packs, they would have suffered from the cold. Their consuming thirst grew more intense with each passing minute. Unless water was discovered within a few hours, they must all succumb.

Toward midnight, Vicente, who was slightly in advance of the others, gave a hoarse cry of joy. "A light, a light!" he shouted. "Where there is fire there are people, and where there are people there is water."

The others, breathless with joy and excitement, hurried up to him, and there, truly enough, was the dull glow of a fire in the distance. It was surprising what a change this sight had on the exhausted, suffering men. It revived their hopes, and with hope came renewed energy; they broke into a slow run toward the light that meant salvation.

"Leave your packs here," Stanley shouted to the men; "we can get them later or in the morning."

They needed no second admonition, but dropped their burdens in a heap, and, unincumbered by their weight, were able to run at a faster pace. After fifteen minutes, they came suddenly upon a path that could be distinguished clearly in the moonlight. Without hesitation Vicente headed straight down the beaten track, and a moment later an exultant shout announced that his surmise had proved correct. The others rushed to the spot. There it lay, glistening and shimmering in the silvery light—a small limpid pool. With one accord they threw themselves on the sand and buried their faces in the cold water. Again and again they drank, not stopping to utter a single word, until each had drunk his fill. Then they heaved a sigh of relief and gave fervent thanks for their deliverance.

The hut from which the light emanated could be discerned a hundred yards up the trail. It was low and squat, and matched the surrounding sand so perfectly that it could not have been distinguished except for the dull glow that shone through the door and window openings.

"Suppose we send the men back for the packs while we go on to the hut," Stanley suggested.

"That is not a bad plan," Ted agreed. "No doubt some Indian lives there—probably a Quichua. You will have a chance to show how much of his language you remember after all those months of study."

"How about you? You spent as much time on it as I did. But what do you suppose Indians would think about visitors calling at this time of night?"

"That remains to be seen. Anyway, they are at home and up, or the fire would not be burning. Come on; let's get started."

The sailors were despatched for the packs, while the two Americans went cautiously to the hut. As they approached it, they could hear faint sounds coming from the illuminated interior. At first there was a low chant in unvaried and monotonous cadence; then a single voice rose in a wild, fanatical shriek, and died down again to the slow, steady murmurings. This was repeated again and again, as Ted and Stanley crouched in the darkness and looked at one another in wondering silence. Finally Ted could endure the suspense no longer.

"I don't know what it is all about," he whispered. "But I'll bet there is some mischief going on in that shack."

"Sounds as if there might be a sick person and some medicine-man or devil doctor is trying to cure him," Stanley returned.

"Sounds more like murder to me. Let's creep up and take a look inside."

They made their way noiselessly to the low doorway of the hut, and peered inside. The sight that met their eyes filled them with apprehension.

On the floor, partially covered with gaudily colored blankets, lay an aged man with long, snowy hair, apparently ill and helpless. Bending over him was another and seemingly younger person of the most grotesque appearance imaginable. A crown of black and white feathers rose high above his flowing black hair; his face was elaborately painted with black and white so as to represent a skull; the bare arms were covered with numerous amulets and bracelets from which many charms of feathers, dry seeds, and bells dangled. A loose white robe with a wide black belt covered his body. In one hand the figure held a long, keen-bladed knife; in the other, a stone-headed war-club. He was rocking slowly to and fro in rhythm to his weird, droning chant. Between the two of them, Ted and Stanley could make out a number of the things he was saying in the Quichua language.

"Call on Manco, call on Huascar, call on Atahualpa, and all the great kings, your ancestors," the voice was murmuring. "Why do they not heed your prayer? Why have they forsaken you? It is because the days of the Inca are over; you, Yupanqui, have outlived your day of usefulness, for you are old, and besides, your life has been spent in treachery and deceit. You say the great king still lives and rules in magnificence and splendor. Lies! lies, all. The tribute we have paid to him through you has been squandered; it has never reached him, because he does not live; for, if he exists, why does he not protect his people from the oppression and cruelty of the conquerors? In vain have we hoped and waited year after year. We are tired of you, an impostor. Therefore I, Tacama, death-doctor by right of heritage, have been chosen to relieve you of the life that is hateful to us. Confess and clear your spirit of guilt before it is forever too late. Say

that your journeys into the land of the rising sun have been but to deceive us! Admit that there is no living Child of the Sun and that you came only to rob us, the dwellers of the lowlands, for the enrichment of the mountain villages from whence you came."

The aged man gazed unflinchingly into the eyes of his persecutor.

"I am Yupanqui," he replied faintly, "brother of Huayna Capac, who lives and rules in the Valley of the Sun, and am his emissary. Once each ten years have I made the perilous journey, alone and unattended, to bring you word of him and to receive your oath of allegiance in order that the nation may remain united and prepared for the day when vengeance will be ours."

"Lies! more lies!" shouted the medicine-man, wildly waving his arms. "Yet not by the blade nor by the club shall you perish; they are reserved for the honorable warrior. But by these, these." So saying he threw aside the weapons and displayed the crimson-tinted palms of his hands. With a shriek he leaped astride the helpless form and began clutching at his throat.

Without a word Stanley and Ted bounded into the hut. For an instant the death-doctor was startled; then he sprang to his feet and made for the club which was lying near by on the earth floor. In a flash they were upon him. The man fought like a maniac, but the struggle was too unequal to last long. They threw him to the ground and held him firmly.

"A thousand pardons if we are intruding," Ted said, looking at the aged man. "But, if you will tell us what to do with the prisoner, we shall be glad to gratify your wish."

The old man cast a look of scorn and triumph upon

the cringing form of his would-be executioner. "Go," he commanded him in a feeble voice. "Go!" and as they released him, the fetish man slunk away into the darkness. Then he raised his eyes to his deliverers. The light of the flaming pitch torches on the walls, falling full upon him, revealed a face which, furrowed with age, was nevertheless kindly, and portrayed a high degree of intelligence. His color was light, in fact almost white, and the snowy hair gave him a venerable appearance.

"I know not whence you came, men of the white race," he addressed them, "nor how you chanced to arrive just when I needed your assistance, for my own people have turned against me; but this I do know: you have saved me from a disgraceful end at the hands of the vile *despeñador*, as your brothers, the conquerors, call him."

"The *despeñador*?" Ted asked.

"Yes, the death-doctor of my people. He is an institution old as the tribe itself. The ancient code of the great Incas, my all-wise and revered fathers, provided that there must be one in each village and many in the large cities. Theirs was the duty to take the lives of the aged, the weak, and the infirm who could no longer till the soil and fight the battles of the nation. Then, the regulation was dictated by wisdom divine, for the soil was poor and gave but scanty return for unceasing labor; the subjects to be fed were many and our enemies too were numerous, so there was no room for the unfit. Now this is no longer true, for we are few, and our former enemies as well as we ourselves have bowed to the yoke of the invaders. There are no more wars and there is food enough for all. But never, even in the days of ancient glory, was



With a shriek he leaped astride the helpless form and began clutching
at his throat

a member of the royal family subjected to this law; no subject dared even enter, unbidden, into the sacred presence of his ruler. But times have changed. Oh! that it had to come to this, that I, Yupanqui and brother of Huayna Capac, wearer of the vicuna diadem, should be subjected to the indignity of the attempt. My people, my own people, have renounced me."

So saying, the aged chief broke down and wept bitterly. After a few minutes he regained his composure.

"And you?" he said. "You white men from beyond the sea—for my eyes tell me that you belong not to the race of the conquerors—what brings you here? I know! you need not tell me. It is the search for gold, gold, the treasure of my nation, our curse and the cause of our downfall, as it would be yours also if you secured it. You have saved me from a shameful death; for this I will reward you. I have but a few hours to live; the fever of the lowlands has upset my mind or I should not be telling you this. Take this, and carry it to my brother Huayna Capac who rules the remnant of his faithful people in the Valley of the Sun. There shall you see all the riches and the glory of the ancient kingdom."

So saying, he produced a massive ring of gold from under the blankets and placed it in the outstretched hands of Ted.

"Take it to Huayna Capac," he repeated, "and tell him of me. Show him the sacred emblem of office and he will welcome you."

"But where," asked Stanley, kneeling beside the dying man and taking his hands in his own, "where, great and venerable chief, lives Huayna Capac, your

brother, and how may we reach the Valley of the Sun?"

The aged man's face grew tense, as if in remembrance of many perils and hardships.

"It is many days' journey from here. The way is beset with dangers to which you may fall victims before reaching it. If you go, take no other white man with you. Promise that you will obey my injunctions, on your honor to a dying man."

"We promise that your commands will be obeyed," both Ted and Stanley assured him in solemn voices.

"Then shall I tell you this." The voice was growing fainter; it was apparent that the man had not much longer to live. "Listen closely, and heed my words wisely, for I am an old man and know whereof I speak. The Valley of the Sun lies in a hidden, sacred spot beyond the high mountains to the east. Journey first to the great lake among the clouds from whence came Manco Capac, first Child of the Sun, thence northwest to the holy city of my fathers; you will find it desecrated and in ruins. Descend the slopes and the valleys to the east until you reach the hot, steaming lowlands, but go no further into the interior. Keep among the foothills, with your faces to the north, until a mighty river is reached; this must you contrive to cross.

"You will then be in the land of the Macacos; you will know them when you reach their country, for they are fierce warriors and cannibals and worshippers of the Holy Tree; and they will seek to destroy you and offer you as a sacrifice to their tree-god. Now indeed must you use the greatest caution; travel by night only. When you reach the second stream, which is small and broken by many rapids, follow up its

course until you reach the Cave of Darkness and Oblivion, so called because those who enter never return through its portal. Go into it fearlessly, along the narrow ledge you will find—though slowly and carefully, for a single misstep will mean death.

“At the end of the cave you will see a crystal pool glowing with the subdued light of heaven, for, while within the cavern there is only blackness peopled with shadowy forms and the chill of death, yet in the bottom of the pool shall you see the blue sky and the golden sunlight. Cast the holy emblem of my kingly office, which I have just given you, into the unsullied water; it is your key, and without the ring you can never gain admittance. Then wait, quietly and reverently; ere long the golden messenger of the great king will appear to show you the way into the hidden valley. But of this must I warn you: Even though you shall behold the vast treasure consecrated to the service of the sun-god and his child, the Inca, you will also discover that there are many things infinitely more valuable than gold.”

At the conclusion of this lengthy speech, delivered with many pauses for breath, the old chief sank into an exhausted stupor. Ted ran to bring water from an earthenware jar that stood in one corner of the room; when he returned, the man had entered into his long, unwaking sleep.

CHAPTER VI

THE CHIEF IS DEAD

THE sudden encounter with Tacama, the death-doctor, and the events that followed, left Ted and Stanley in an unsettled and dazed condition. The first thing they did was to assure themselves that the old man was really dead.

"He is done for; no question about that," Ted announced, after an examination of the motionless form on the floor.

"Poor old fellow," said Stanley. "I am sorry there was nothing we could do for him. He must have been nearly gone when we came in."

"He looks almost like a white man, and he certainly acted very intelligently, for an Indian," Ted commented. "His appearance and manners were even distinguished, it seemed to me. I shouldn't doubt but that he really was a chief, but of course I don't place much faith in his story. The poor man was delirious and told us the things that had been on his mind. Probably he had been brooding over the wrongs suffered by his people until it unbalanced his mind, and he really believed to be true the things he had imagined."

Stanley remained silent for some time, apparently lost in deep thought.

"Perhaps you are right," he said finally. "But I have been thinking that the very fact that he was out of his mind led him to tell us secrets he would not have told under any other circumstances. An Indian

is very close-mouthed and will not tell even his name to another member of the same tribe, much less to a white man. This man unburdened his soul to us. Remember, he was sick and dying, and under such conditions men often tell their innermost secrets. Now, if he really was a chief, he should bear the marks of his office. I remember reading in the account of Pedro Pizarro that members of the royal family wore great golden ornaments in their ears." He knelt down beside the motionless figure and slowly pushed back the snow-white hair. They were there, huge wheels of shining yellow metal, the diameter of an orange, and drooping down to the shoulders.

"Still," Stanley continued thoughtfully, "that tells us nothing. A clever impostor would certainly copy the customs of the ancient nobles. For some reason or other, though, I believe this man told the truth."

"Then you mean that his story about the Valley of the Sun and the people who live there is really true?" Ted asked excitedly.

"I don't exactly say that I believe all of it, but I think there may be a good deal of truth in it. Let's have a look at the ring."

The massive circlet of beaten gold was carefully scrutinized by the light of the flickering pitch torches. Evidently it was made to be worn on the thumb, for it was of very large size. In many respects it resembled a signet-ring of the present day. In the centre, in bold relief, were the images of a mountain peak and the sun above it. On one side was a bird with spread wings, a condor probably, and on the other a sheep-like animal that they identified as a llama. It was an elaborate piece of work and in itself well worth having.

"Well," Stanley said slowly, after a few moments' deliberation, "this strengthens my belief in the old man's story, if anything; it surely looks old and mysterious. At any rate, we must retain possession of this ring at all costs, for it is our key to the hidden valley if that really exists. Future events may throw more light on the matter. We can only wait and see."

Just then shouts and the tramp of feet in the sand announced the return of the sailors, so Stanley hastily slipped the ring into his pocket.

Ted met the men at the door and told them that there was a man inside who had just died, apparently of fever; he told them nothing of the encounter with Tacama nor of the chief's story.

The sailors filed into the hut silently and with bared heads, but at Stanley's suggestion soon withdrew, and after preparing supper sought their blankets for a much-needed rest. When they were asleep, Ted extinguished the last of the pitch torches, the others having already burned down and gone out of their own accord. "We had better keep our eyes and ears open awhile," he said. "There is no telling that the medicine-man will not return, and we must not be caught off our guard."

"Yes, and he might bring some of his clan with him," Stanley replied.

"Suppose we watch in shifts," Ted suggested. "Make it two hours on and two off for sleep."

"I don't feel like sleeping. You lie down and when I get tired I will call you."

"No, I could not sleep if I tried. We might just as well watch together until one or the other tires out. This whole business seems like a dream to me; in fact, I am not sure that I am awake. First we are starving

for water and, just as we are nearing the end of our earthly career, we stumble on this old man who tells us exactly what we wanted to know. It's too good to be true. Am I awake or am I dreaming?"

"You are wide awake, all right; but do not think we have accomplished very much so far. We have just started; the hardest work is ahead. Let's walk to keep warm."

They secured their rifles, which had been left standing against the outer wall of the hut, so as to be ready in the event of an attack. It was well into the night and a cold wind had sprung up from the direction of the mountains. The stars twinkled brilliantly in the unclouded sky, but there were no signs of life other than the lone hut and the sleeping sailors.

"Judging by what the old man said," Stanley began, as they started to pace back and forth over the crunching sand, "we have anything but an easy job before us in the event that we decide to hunt for the hidden valley."

"We might as well try to follow his directions until we are convinced that he was not telling the truth, especially as we had no other definite plan made. At least, he gave us some clue to work on and it sounds exciting."

"I was thinking the same thing. His description of the Macacos was not particularly attractive."

"Macaco is the Spanish name for a monkey of some kind, isn't it?" asked Ted.

"Yes. Perhaps he meant monkeys, not Indians. It is said that there is a tribe of monkey-men somewhere in the upper Amazon. No one has ever succeeded in entering their country and returning, because they are said to be all the old man claimed, and more

too. However, several explorers have written stories about them that they heard from Indians inhabiting the neighboring regions. The Amazon is a very long river and rises in the mountains, so he may have referred to this same tribe."

"What do you think of his story about the mysterious pool in the cave?"

"Well," Stanley replied, "at times he talked rationally enough. By 'lake among the clouds,' he meant Lake Titicaca, of course. That's easy, but when he mentions a pool in a pitch-black cavern, with blue sky and sunlight reflected in the water, then I cannot follow him, for that is an impossibility."

"He said, too, that although we should see great treasure, we should also discover that there are many things infinitely more valuable than gold, and that once inside the valley we could never return from it."

"He may have been right in the former. We must stick by the hard-and-fast resolution we made when we first planned this trip. If we find the treasure that was thrown away or concealed hundreds of years ago, and of which all trace has been lost, it is ours by right of discovery. But, if any gold we may see is still in the possession of its rightful owners, taking it would be plain stealing, and we could not take it without their consent. For example, it is right to keep the ring the old chief gave us, for he *gave* it to us; but neither you nor I would touch the pendants in his ears, because he did *not* give them to us and we have no right to them. As to returning from the valley, that does not worry me. If there is no exit by way of the cave through which we are to enter, then there must be some other, for did he not come out every ten years for his rounds of the villages in the outer country?"

Ted and Stanley discussed these and many other things during their hours of watchfulness. Time had passed more quickly than they had realized, and it was nearly morning. They agreed that the danger of attack was now very remote, so they lay down for a short rest.

The light of day revealed many new things. The hut, which was of considerable size, was built of blocks of adobe and had a grass roof; it consisted of three rooms. The first, in which the dead chief lay, contained only a fireplace surrounded by earthenware cooking pots and water jars and a pile of fire-wood. The other two rooms were filled with a medley assortment of blankets, the dried skins of animals, brightly-colored feathers, tom-toms, reed flutes, corn and potatoes; also, strings of queer objects such as birds' claws, teeth, sea-shells, and the wings of bats, hanging on the walls. These were evidently charms of some kind. The hut must have been the domicile of Tacama, who preferred to live alone and unobserved in the desert, safe from the prying eyes of intruders while he was engaged in his wretched practices.

A path led directly from the hut to a high spur of the range that projected into the desert from the mountains and was not over two miles away. The main chain of mountains was itself much nearer than they had supposed. It had been surmised the night before that there must be a village or settlement near by; the fire-wood and food in the hut added to the strength of this conviction, for there were no trees or plant life of any kind in sight, and it was obvious that these articles had been brought from some place not far distant. Ted and Stanley decided to push on to this settlement as quickly as possible, in order to notify

whoever they might find of the events of the previous evening or, at least, of those relating to the chief's death, and also to secure information of their exact whereabouts.

Accordingly, they carefully closed the door of the hut and, shouldering their packs, started up the trail. In less than an hour they had rounded the base of the spur, and there before their eyes lay a green little valley with trees and grass and cultivated fields; also a number of adobe huts standing in a compact cluster and forming a village of some size. When they reached the settlement, the inhabitants, who were apparently all Indians, stared at them in idle curiosity as they passed but showed no further interest. They were a rather short, stolid-looking lot, of a light-brown color, clad in loose-fitting garments of homespun wool dyed in various colors.

"Where can we find the *alcalde*?" Captain Gonzales asked one of the men who came shuffling down the narrow street between the two rows of low dwellings. Gonzales, being himself a native of Spanish America, knew that each village, no matter how small, must have an *alcalde* or mayor, who represented his government, kept peace and order, decided disputes, collected taxes, and managed things in general. It is to this official that all appeals for help and all reports must be made.

The Indian merely grunted and pointed to the largest house in the street. In common with most members of his tribe, as Ted and Stanley learned later, the Quichua understood Spanish but was averse to speaking it.

The mayor, a young Spaniard of neat appearance, received them courteously, ordered an attendant to

bring coffee, and then inquired if he could be of any service. Briefly they told him of the previous night's experience, omitting, however, all reference to the old man's story and the ring. He called his sergeant of police, an Indian, and gave a few curt orders. For the time being, the incident was closed.

The Americans were astonished at the politeness of the Spaniard. He assumed that they were miners and advised them to try the high mountains; there was no gold in the lowlands. Fortunately, he did not inquire into the nature of their past experiences, so they were saved the trouble of making an explanation.

"I should be pleased to show the *señores* my valley," he said finally. "It is not large—only a few square miles. We call it La Vega, meaning fertile plain. The climate is always delightful; there is an abundance of water and food, and my Indians are quiet and satisfied."

Together they left the settlement for a walk in the little oasis amid the parched and burning desert. They passed through cultivated fields where maize, potatoes, sugar-cane, and vegetables grew in abundance. The rippling murmur of water was constantly in their ears, coming from the network of ditches that served to irrigate the area. There were also clusters of fruit-trees bearing oranges, guavas, and figs, and rows of grape-vines.

"This seems like a paradise after all that sand and heat," Ted commented, helping himself to a huge bunch of deep-purple grapes. "I am in favor of staying here awhile."

Stanley was filling his hat with plump blue figs. "Right now I feel like staying here forever," he returned. "Look at these figs! I have never tasted

a fresh, ripe fig before. Here goes." He took a large bite, but after a moment plainly showed his disappointment. "It's about as tasteless as a wet rag," he said by way of explanation. "Who would have thought it! Dried figs for mine hereafter."

"Better stick to something you know," Ted advised. "Some of these things might be poison. I can recommend the grapes, and the oranges are fine, too."

"I can get grapes and oranges at home. Wonder what these are."

In the corner of a field stood a small clump of low trees with round tops and dense, dark-green foliage. Scattered among the leaves were round fruits almost the size of a baseball and of a deep-red color.

"Better not," Ted cautioned him, as Stanley reached for one of the glistening fruits. "I'm warning you."

"Oh shucks! I am a scientist and believe in finding out things; then I know from personal experience," Stanley boasted. He broke one of the red spheres in two and put a large piece into his mouth. "Zowie!" he yelled. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Because a scientist believes in finding out things for himself; the next time you see an unripe persimmon you will recognize it, I hope."

Stanley coughed and sputtered, but all to no avail. His mouth became so puckered that by the time their host, who had stopped to converse with one of the Indian farmers, returned, he could hardly speak. He felt humiliated and almost irritated.

"Those Japanese persimmons are delicious when they are ripe," the alcalde explained when he saw what had occurred. "But when they are green they are *muy malo*. I imported these trees from Tucuman,

in the Argentine, where they have been grown with great success, and they are doing nicely here too."

Stanley was too occupied to listen to this discourse. "Never mind, old sport," he managed to say to Ted with difficulty, "your time is coming. Remember about 'he who laughs last,' don't you? If not, I will remind you some day."

On their way back to the village, the Spaniard asked if he could be of any assistance in sending them to their next stopping-place, wherever that might be. He had mules and men at his disposal and should be glad to render them any assistance possible.

They thanked him for his kindness.

"We have been thinking of visiting Lake Titicaca," Stanley informed him. "We have heard a good deal about the great inland sea among the clouds. It figures so largely in the legends and history of the country that a visit to Peru is not complete without a trip to this vast body of water high among the mountain peaks."

The alcalde grew almost enthusiastic. "Yes, it is wonderful," he said. "Think of it! A lake one hundred and forty miles long and sixty miles wide, fourteen thousand feet above the ocean and surrounded by snow-capped mountains and volcanoes. It is small now compared to former times, for during the recent geological period it has shrunk to one-tenth its original size. It is so deep that no one has ever found the bottom. From its islands came the first Inca, Manco Capac, and his wife, Mama Oello. Its shores are covered with the ruins of ancient cities and temples thousands and thousands of years old. Some say that the Indians threw their treasures into the lake at the time of the Spanish invasion, but others think they

were hidden where they could be recovered if necessary. Yes, you must visit the lake: it is marvellous."

"The distance from here is very great, though," Stanley parried, not wishing to disclose the fact that they did not know their present location.

"In leagues, yes, it is great. But the journey may be made in three days. From here I will send you to Bonillas, but a four hours' ride. Then you can take the train to Arequipa, rest a day to become accustomed to the rare atmosphere of the high altitude, and on the third day proceed by rail to Puna on the shore of the lake."

The two travellers tried hard not to show their joyful surprise. Here they were within a four hours' ride of the Mollendo-Puna Railroad and—they had been lost and nearly died of thirst. How they thanked their lucky stars for the good fortune that had so far attended them. Always, when the future looked darkest had the brightest light appeared. Would it continue to be so in the future? Surely, this luck could not last forever.

It was midday when they approached the village. While still some distance away, the sound of shouting reached their ears. The alcalde stopped short and listened intently.

"Something is wrong," he said in answer to their inquiring looks. "I must hurry back. To-day is not a fiesta and my Indians have never acted like this before."

They hastened their steps, and upon entering the cluster of dwellings they were convinced that something of an unusual nature indeed must have occurred during their absence. The crooked, narrow streets were filled with a mob of shouting, wildly gesticulat-

ing Indians, and a great crowd had gathered in front of the mayor's house; the throngs hushed their clamor and stood back to permit the official and his two companions to pass. Upon entering the mayor's office the party was confronted by the sergeant and a number of Indians, who had just returned with the body of the aged man which lay on the floor. They too seemed greatly perturbed.

"What is the meaning of all this commotion?" the alcalde demanded of his assistant.

The sergeant, with a nod of his head, indicated the form on the floor, but said nothing.

"Well, who is it?" insisted the officer.

At this the sergeant burst into tears and the peons who were with him joined in loud lamentation.

"You act worse than squaws," the alcalde upbraided him, stooping down to uncover the face of the dead man. After he had looked at it intently, he shook his head. "He is a stranger to me. I have been here five years but never have I seen this man before. Perhaps they can tell me something." He stepped outside and closed the door.

Ted and Stanley could hear their host's voice and the clamor of the multitude that answered him, but the sounds were too confused for them to understand anything that was said. At the end of fifteen minutes he returned and motioned the two Americans to follow him into an adjoining room.

"They say the dead man was a great chief of the tribe, and that they have been expecting him for nearly a year. He seems to have blundered into the *tambo* of their medicine-man, named Tacama, where you found him. There had been a personal feud between the two over some matter they will not divulge but

probably it was jealousy; these chiefs and native doctors are always jealous of each other's power and influence, so they suspect that Tacama was responsible for the other's death. Strange how these people will stick to their old beliefs and alliances. To all appearances they are docile enough, but let anything happen to remind them of their old superstitions and up they flare, just as at present. What can I do to stop it? I am alone and they are many. They want the body of their chief. If I give it to them, they will hold wild celebrations for weeks to come; if I refuse, they will contrive to get hold of it anyway. Mico!" he called his sergeant—"Let them have it, but warn them that if there is any infraction of the law they will be severely punished."

A moment later, a shout from the multitude announced that the Indians had reclaimed their own; then the sounds of wailing and lamenting grew steadily fainter as the mob wended its way up the valley, and finally it was lost in the distance.

"How will they dispose of the dead chief?" Ted asked after the noise had stopped.

"They will perhaps hide him in a cave, or build a shrine in some remote spot in the mountains, where members of the tribe can go on sacred pilgrimages for years to come. They venerate and worship their dead kings and nobles," the alcalde informed him.

The hardships of the previous days and the lack of sleep began to make themselves felt, so Stanley and Ted, at the suggestion of their courteous host, gladly agreed to spend the afternoon in rest. He showed them to a room containing beds and an abundance of blankets of native weave; it was the first time the two had been alone for any length of time since reaching the village.

"Now what do you think of the whole affair?" Ted asked, the moment the alcalde had withdrawn from the room.

"I am more than ever convinced that the old chief was telling the truth," Stanley replied. "We must get out of here as soon as possible. They may miss the ring or suspect that we know something, and might take steps to frustrate our plans. They are ugly customers when aroused and we do not want any trouble with them."

They wrapped themselves in the blankets and before long were fast asleep.

Darkness had settled over the valley when Ted awoke with a start. The room was in inky blackness; all was silent without.

"Stanley," he called, fumbling among his clothes, which had been left in a heap on the floor. "Strike a match and see what time it is. It must be pretty late; I had no idea we slept so long."

"How about striking a light yourself?" Stanley replied in sleepy voice.

"I can't find my matches, or my watch either."

"You are always losing something. I never saw any one like you," and he began to search his own clothes for the desired articles.

"Great heavens!" he cried after a few moments' frantic search. "My pockets are empty. I have been robbed."

"And I too," Ted exclaimed. "Some one has been through my clothes and taken everything."

Their eyes having become somewhat accustomed to the darkness, Ted could make out a table near the window. In passing his hands over the top he found both a candle and matches, and soon the room was lit up by the flickering, yellow candle-light.

Some one had indeed gone through their clothing while they were fast asleep. Robbery had evidently not been the motive, however, for all the missing articles were scattered over the floor. Knives, money, matches, watches, everything was there. But, was it? No! One thing had disappeared.

"The ring, the ring!" Stanley cried in consternation. "It is gone."

They stared at one another with sober and apprehensive faces. Then they reached the only possible conclusion. After they had ejected Tacama from the hut on the previous night, he had remained near the open door or window, and had listened to the statements of the dying chief. Therefore, he too knew of the existence of the hidden valley and the value of the ring to its possessor. Under cover of darkness he had entered the alcalde's dwelling and, finding the Americans fast asleep, had stolen the priceless signet. Tacama, the death-doctor, it was evident, believed the old chief's story and meant to profit by it. Could they longer doubt it? They might as well not know the secret now, for without the ring it would be impossible to enter the hidden valley. Their only hope lay in overtaking the fugitive and recovering the stolen ring; but the possibility of accomplishing this seemed very remote. The only time they had seen Tacama he had been disguised so that they would not recognize him in his ordinary Indian attire in the event that they should cross his trail. Besides this, he had secured the start—was already probably on the way.

"Why didn't we take better care of it?" Ted said regretfully. "We should not have let it lay around where any one could find it so easily."

Stanley's face was grim with determination. "It is too late for that now," he replied. "The thing to do is not to waste time with regrets, but to go after the thief and get back what rightfully belongs to us. It may be a long and a hopeless job, but we will run across him somehow, somewhere. Let's pack up and get started right away."

CHAPTER VII

BEGINNING OF THE PURSUIT OF TACAMA

AFTER a minute's reflection, the impracticability of starting after Tacama that night occurred to Stanley.

"It is now two o'clock," he said after consulting his watch. "That means at least four hours until daylight. I should say the best we can do is to wait until morning and then start as early as possible."

"But think of the time we are wasting," argued Ted. "If we wait till daybreak we are simply giving the thief that much more of a start. We haven't a minute to lose if we are ever going to overtake him, and I am all for starting right now."

"I agree with you that we should be on our way at once, but have you considered that there is a long trip ahead of us to Bonillas, that we do not know the way, and that it would be impossible to get the men and mules together at this time of night?"

"We might try, anyway. I'm going to see if I can find the alcalde and talk it over with him."

"It will be useless. He told me that the train from Mollendo does not leave Bonillas till four in the afternoon. Even if we did start now and thereby gain a few hours, we should simply lose them again waiting for the train," said Stanley.

"I didn't know about the train-time," Ted apologized. "Of course, that changes matters. We might as well go back to bed, then, and try to get some more sleep."

Before extinguishing the candle, however, they carefully searched the room in the faint hope that the ring might not have been stolen after all and that some one had merely gone through their pockets out of curiosity; but their efforts availed them nothing.

"If ever I get hold of that ring again, I'm going to put it on a string and wear it around my neck," Ted said gloomily, after every part of the room had been thoroughly explored.

"And have some one cut your head off to get it back again," returned Stanley. "I know of a better scheme."

"Well? Let's have it. Where would you keep it?"

"Wait until we get it and you'll see."

They were awakened the next morning by an old Indian servant who entered the room with small cups of strong, black coffee. It was after six o'clock and the first, slanting rays of light were penetrating through the open window.

The two Americans drank the coffee, plunged their faces into the bowls of cold water which the old servant then brought, and speedily dressed and went out into the *patio* or little inner court upon which their room opened.

They found the *alcalde* awaiting them. He greeted them courteously and when he expressed the hope that they had slept well, they truthfully assured him that they had—"all too well," Ted was on the point of saying. They saw nothing of Moses and the sailors, who had been placed in the servants' quarters in the rear of the house.

"Now that we have rested," said Stanley, "we must be on our way again."

The Spaniard looked surprised and disappointed.

"What! leave already?" he asked anxiously. "No, no! you must be my guests a week, or several days at least. I have not much to offer, it is true, but to such poor accommodations as I can give, you are welcome."

"It isn't that," Stanley hastened to assure him. "We could wish for no better treatment than you have given us, but——"

"Then why do you not remain?" he pleaded. "Strangers come to La Vega so rarely. All the year I am alone with my Indians. Yesterday you came; to-day you wish to leave. A few days cannot make much difference to you, and your company will mean much pleasure to me."

"I am sorry, but we must leave to-day," Stanley insisted. "Our time is limited and we have many places to visit and many things to do. The train leaves Bonillas at four, I believe; we must make it."

"That is impossible. The Indians have not yet returned from their funeral feast. They may not be back for a long time. The ceremonies of burying a great chief last many days. Without my Indians I cannot send you, for there is no one to bring the mules from the pastures nor to care for them on the trail."

Here was a new situation confronting them. They knew that the alcalde spoke the truth, for had they not heard the shouting mob depart from the valley the previous day?

"Wait," he urged, "until *mañana*. Perhaps some of them may be back by then."

Before leaving home, Ted and Stanley had been warned against one thing—the *mañana* or to-morrow habit of the Spanish Americans, and they had deter-

mined not to adopt this custom, for—to-morrow never comes.

"We shall be glad to round up the mules and drive them ourselves," Ted suggested.

"But who would bring them back?" the official asked. "I have not a single man to send. The village is deserted; only Domingo, my servant, remains, and he is too old to make the trip."

"Then we shall go without mules," said Stanley. "We carried our packs this far and I suppose we can carry them a few miles farther."

That settled the matter. By the time the sailors had been called and breakfast was over, it was nearly eight o'clock. That left eight hours in which to reach the railroad station. If mules could make it in four hours, surely they could in eight.

Stanley explained to the men, briefly, the plans for the day. After reaching Bonillas, he and Ted, accompanied by Moses and Vicente, were to continue the journey into the interior, while Captain Gonzales and the rest of the sailors would take the next train down to Mollendo and from there return to Panama or Guayaquil, whichever they preferred, on the first available steamer.

Vicente's attitude toward the Americans had undergone a sudden change. His early contempt had apparently given way to admiration. It is true, he had always obeyed orders promptly and had at times even appeared eager to show off his prowess before them, but his attitude as a whole had been one of indifference. Just before leaving La Vega he had begged to be permitted to accompany them, and they had been glad to avail themselves of his services.

Moses was eager to go with them anywhere, indeed,

he considered himself a part of the expedition from the day he had been found, and in return they had found him so useful that it never occurred to them not to take him with them.

When packs had been slung, the alcalde accompanied them to the edge of the valley and pointed out a narrow path running along the foot of the spur toward the main range of mountains.

"This," he said, "is a much shorter trail than the mule road, but it is more difficult. The Indians always use it and it is so well worn that you cannot lose it. Follow it until you see a village; that is Bonillas."

Looking into the distance, they could make out a narrow, threadlike, winding mark on the face of the slope; it went upward at a sharp angle, but it was short, so the alcalde had said, and meant a saving of time. They could not afford to take the least chance of missing the train that afternoon, for that would entail a delay of twenty-four hours—the loss of a whole precious day. Each hour they lost was a distinct gain for Tacama.

After thanking the alcalde for his hospitality and bidding him farewell, the party started up the slope. The trail was well beaten and had the appearance of having been used by generations of Indians, so there was no difficulty in following it. At first it wound up gradually from the little valley.

Ridge after ridge of mountains reared their crests skyward. The nearer ones could now be distinguished as clearly defined masses of rock, cleft here and there with fearsome, dark ravines; beyond them rose the chains of taller peaks that finally lost themselves in veils of purplish haze.

Around the men were sloping fields of bare sand in-

terspersed at irregular intervals with areas of outcropping granite.

They toiled rapidly onward until noon. Then they stopped for a short rest.

"We should be almost there," said Ted, depositing his pack on a convenient stone.

"We had better be well over half-way anyhow," returned Stanley. "Only four more hours left, but we can go a long way in that length of time."

They ate the lunch the alcalde had provided for them and resumed the journey. Soon after, they reached the foot of the first ridge. The trail led abruptly upward over the face of the steep incline, winding back and forth in a snakelike manner, but in half an hour they had reached the summit.

Ahead of them lay a deep depression, and beyond that rose another and more abrupt line of hills than the one they had just traversed. Climbing up the second slope was harder work, both on account of the steeper incline and because the foothold was more precarious. In spots the path consisted of little more than a succession of narrow steps hewn into the rocks; in others the crumbling sand gave way beneath their feet and threatened to hurl them back down to be buried under the landslide.

Although they toiled steadily onward, stopping occasionally only for a few moments in which to regain their breath, the top of the ridge was still far above them.

"It is three o'clock now," said Stanley finally, during one of the brief periods of rest. "The railroad must be right on the other side of the hill."

"I am beginning to wonder if the alcalde told the truth when he said this trail was a short one," Ted

returned. "Seems to me we should have reached Bonillas hours ago."

As Stanley made no rejoinder, Ted continued:

"He may have heard about the ring and deliberately thrown us off the track in order to give Tacama a good start."

"No, I don't think so at all," Stanley returned quickly. "No doubt the Indians can make the trip in a few hours, because they are accustomed to this kind of travel. We have not become hardened yet, so could hardly expect to do it as fast as they. I think the alcalde is square; let's give him the benefit of the doubt, anyway, until we have proof to the contrary."

They shouldered their packs and resumed the struggle up the steep hillside which grew ever more precipitous.

Ten minutes, twenty minutes, a half-hour passed and still they had not reached the top; indeed, at the rate they were going it would take at least another half-hour before this could be accomplished. They consulted their watches at frequent intervals, but neither spoke, each knowing only too well the thoughts that occupied the mind of the other. They urged the men to a faster gait and redoubled their own efforts; still they seemed to make little headway up the rocky declivity.

"Are we ever going to reach the top?" Ted asked in desperation.

"Doesn't look like it. Look, just ahead," Stanley returned.

Ted looked. The slope they had been climbing ended sharply a hundred feet above; in its place rose a sheer wall of gray rock that defied their further progress in that direction.

"I see," said Ted, trying hard to conceal his dis-

appointment. "We have reached the end of the trail. Now do you believe that the alcalde is in on Tacama's scheme, and has purposely sent us up here on a wild goose chase?"

"Not at all. You don't think this path leads to the base of the cliff and then stops, do you? It must go somewhere and we shall soon see where to."

Stanley was right. When they reached the foot of the frowning wall of rock that rose to a height of hundreds of feet, they found that the path made a sudden turn to the right and ran in a level course along the side of the overhanging precipice.

A hundred yards beyond the turn, they came to a narrow cleft where the rock had been split and shattered as if by an earthquake. They passed through the opening and emerged on the top of a gentle slope on the other side of the ridge.

Before them lay Bonillas, not a quarter of a mile away, and stretching on either side of the collection of a dozen low, shambling hovels was the glistening line of steel rails.

"Three-fifty," announced Stanley as they paused for a moment's survey of the scene spread out before their eyes. "Who says we can't make it in ten minutes? It is down-hill all the way; let's run."

"Might as well take your time," Ted answered in exasperated tones. "We have at least twenty-four hours to spend here, so why hurry?"

"Twenty-four hours! What do you mean? It is ten minutes to four and——"

"Then your watch and mine too must be about half an hour slow," Ted interrupted. "See that?" he said, pointing to the higher end of the slanting plain below.

What Stanley saw was enough to dampen the ardor of the most enthusiastic spirit. A locomotive giving off a thin streamer of smoke, and drawing a string of cars, was slowly disappearing in the distance; it was already several miles above the station.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" exploded Stanley. "Train or no train, I am going down there as fast as my feet can carry me. I'd swear by my watch any day; if that train left ahead of time, it is going to come back again or else they will have to give us a special. Come on, men. Show signs of life," and he led the race straight for the village.

The station house at Bonillas was a substantial affair built of adobe, in contrast to the reed huts comprising the remainder of the village. A very much surprised Peruvian ticket-agent looked up hurriedly from the ticking telegraph key he was manipulating, as the two Americans, followed by nine queer-looking strangers, all carrying packs, burst into the room.

"Tell me, señor, at what time was that train due to leave Bonillas?" Ted demanded in the best Spanish he could muster.

"Pardon me, but of which train does the señor stranger speak?" inquired the startled agent.

"The one that left here just a few minutes ago."

"Ah, it has no regular time but leaves on any hour when it is ready."

"What?" asked Stanley. "No regular time? Do you expect passengers to sit here day and night and wait until the train is ready to go?"

"But the señor does not understand," explained the official. "This train does not start from here, so it is not my fault; it merely passes through here on its way from Mollendo to Arequipa. Here is a com-

plaint blank; the señor may write directly to the president of the company."

A number of Indians had gathered about to look at the strangers and listen to the conversation.

"That train passes through here two times a week," continued the ticket agent, "or sometimes three times if business is good in Mollendo. To-morrow it will go down; the day after to-morrow it may make the trip up again; *quien sabe?*"

"Look here," said Stanley impatiently, "I want you to *sabe* this; we have to get to Arequipa to-day; no mañana about it—to-day. Can't you wire for an engine, a hand-car, or anything that will take us there?"

"Why not wait for the train?" asked the agent in surprise.

"Because we are in a hurry. It is important. We cannot wait here two or three days."

"That is not necessary. The passenger train leaves here at five o'clock. It left at four formerly, but now the time is changed."

"But it is gone, isn't it?" asked Stanley incredulously. "Wasn't that it we just saw going up the line?"

"Ah, no, señor. That was the freight."

"Why didn't you tell us that right away?" demanded Ted, trying hard to restrain his temper.

"Because the señor did not ask about the passenger train. He said 'the one that left here just a few minutes ago.' How was I to know?"

"Don't get into an argument," advised Stanley. "Let's be thankful we are in luck after all. We will get the tickets and then go outside; there are a few things to arrange with Gonzales before we leave him."

The tickets bought, the party went out on the station platform. The sailors extracted their personal belongings from the packs, and each man arranged his possessions in a separate, small bundle. They would be compelled to wait in Bonillas until the following morning, but as one of the Indians had offered them the use of his dwelling for the night and they had brought a quantity of food from La Vega, the wait would not expose them to any hardship.

Stanley, at the request of Gonzales, purchased their tickets as far as Mollendo. He also settled his account with the captain and gave each of the sailors sufficient money to provide for his needs while waiting for a steamer at the seaport. As the north-bound boats are always short of hands, they would have no difficulty in securing a job on board at which they could work their passage back home and earn money besides.

In regard to the *Buenaventura*, while Stanley and Ted felt that they were in no way responsible for the accident that had resulted in her destruction, the sloop having been in complete charge of Captain Gonzales, they nevertheless wanted to help him bear at least a part of the loss. It was therefore arranged that while they were in Panama, on their return trip, the vessel should be appraised by a disinterested party; also their belongings which had been lost or damaged. Then they were to divide the loss between them, each party bearing half.

These arrangements had scarcely been completed when the train arrived. So bidding farewell to the sailors, the four climbed into one of the waiting coaches; soon the station had been left behind and the party was at last on its way to Arequipa—the first stage of their journey proper and the first step into the land of the Incas.

The train moved slowly at best. At times the grade was so steep that they wondered how the puffing, wheezing locomotive could make any headway at all. Later they entered an almost level region; there were vast stretches of sand covered with peculiar, crescent-shaped mounds some of which were two or three hundred feet from tip to tip of the half-moons and fifty feet high. They extended a distance of many miles on each side of the track.

"Now, Mr. Scientist," said Ted to Stanley, "can you explain what causes the sand to pile up in those funny formations?"

"Nothing easier," replied Stanley in a dignified manner. "You see, it's like this. The wind sweeping across the desert blows the sand up the outer side of the crescent to its very top; you will notice that the outer side is sloping. When it reaches the top, it tumbles down the inner edge, which you can see is more abrupt. These half-moons keep rolling across the country, very slowly to be sure, but they are moving just the same."

"How interesting," said Ted. "It must take thousands of years for them to move a mile."

After leaving the mound-covered country, the train passed through a narrow cut that had been blasted through a spur of solid rock several hundred feet high. It emerged after a few minutes, on the rim of a deep gorge. A thousand feet below lay a little green valley with a stream threading its way through the centre. At the next station, Indians came to the car windows and offered fruit for sale. This was the first sign of life they had seen since leaving Bonillas.

"What does that little valley remind you of?" asked Stanley as the train resumed its slow upward climb along the brink of the gorge.

"La Vega, of course," Ted replied; "and it also reminds me that we had better walk through the coaches and take a look at the passengers. I do not doubt that Tacama is on this train."

"We never could recognize him," said Stanley. "There are many Indians aboard, and they all look so much alike that we should have a hard time picking him out even if we had seen him without all the paint on his face."

"There can be no harm in looking, anyway," Ted urged, so together they made their way through the second-class cars. These were crowded with Indians. Moses and Vicente were the only other passengers. The former was keeping himself aloof from the crowd that surveyed him with open astonishment and curiosity; Vicente was engaged in conversation with several of the Quichuas—in their own language, Stanley thought at first, but surely he must have been mistaken. Calling him aside, Stanley gave him belated orders that he was not to discuss the object of their journey with any one. Then the two Americans returned to their place in the first-class coach.

Arequipa was reached after nightfall. As they stepped from the train, the chill air of the high level penetrated their thin clothing and made their teeth chatter, but it came as a welcome change from the great heat of the low country.

The following day they went over their outfit and rearranged it in larger and more compact parcels for railroad travel. This consumed the entire morning. The afternoon was spent in viewing the city.

It lies in a fertile valley of some size, over seven thousand feet above the sea. Beautiful public squares planted in trees and shrubbery; ancient churches, and

modern buildings scattered among a rabble of low stone or adobe huts—that is Arequipa. Towering above the valley and all the neighboring peaks of the Andes stands the conical mass of Mount Misti, nineteen thousand feet high, the summit covered with a glistening layer of snow and ice like frosting on a cake.

Having given the passengers a day in the city in which to become somewhat accustomed to the high altitude, the train resumed its run toward Puno.

After leaving the fertile valley of Arequipa, the train again plunged into an arid, desert country; but as it began the gradual ascent of the higher slopes small flecks of green appeared in the desolate landscape. Before long it was worming its way through vast areas covered with grass and low bushes.

About this time some of the passengers began to show signs of uneasiness, and as they continued the upward journey, this uneasiness gave way to a violent sickness. They threw themselves on the floor of the coach, clutched at their throats as if suffocating, and then were seized with sudden nausea.

"*Soroche*," explained a young Peruvian who was riding in the seat across the aisle from the two Americans. Then, seeing their questioning faces, he explained the meaning of the word.

"It is the mountain sickness. We are now in the pass, fourteen thousand five hundred feet up. The atmosphere is very thin on account of this high altitude. People with weak hearts or who smoke a good deal cannot stand it. In many ways *soroche* resembles seasickness, only it is much worse. Occasionally some one dies of it."

Neither Ted nor Stanley suffered the slightest ill effects of the rare atmosphere; they eagerly looked

at the scenery as the train, now on the downward grade, sped along.

The country was a great deal more attractive on this side of the divide. There was a light growth of vegetation, and numerous little blue lakes lay in hollows between the ridges.

Doves in immense flocks inhabited this upland region. In the lakes there were countless numbers of ducks, gulls, and herons. However, more interesting by far were the vast herds of llamas feeding on the slopes. From a distance they looked like large sheep with long legs and very long necks, but a near view showed that they more closely resembled a small camel without humps. They were of many colors—brown, yellow, black, grayish, or blue, and some were spotted.

“Do you know that these animals were largely responsible for the wealth and civilization of the Incan empire?” asked the Peruvian.

“I have read something to that effect,” replied Stanley promptly. “They were kept primarily for their wool, out of which the people made blankets and clothing without which it would have been impossible to live in this cold, high region. Their flesh was also eaten, at least by the Incan nobles; and, as a beast of burden, the llama carried cargoes of food, fuel, and precious metals from the country districts to the cities.”

“In those days,” added the young Peruvian, “the Indians had millions of them. For every one you see now there were a hundred then. You will see many of them to-morrow at the feast.”

“Is there to be a feast to-morrow?” inquired Stanley, greatly interested in the Peruvian’s statement.

“Yes, the feast of the *Raymi*, one of the greatest

in the Incan calendar. All the chiefs and officials of the tribe, including the witch-doctors, must assemble and show themselves to the people and assist in the ceremonies. There will be processions, singing, and dancing. The gorgeous robes of the Indians of royal blood are well worth seeing. No Quichua ever misses this celebration, and if any one of rank fails to be present he at once loses his position and authority. It is strange how they will persist in their old superstitious customs, but so firmly are they implanted in the race that now, after nearly five hundred years of contact with civilization, they would rather lose their lives than be unfaithful to the old traditions. I am the alcalde from Mollendo, and have come to take prisoner one of the head men of the tribe. A whole year he has succeeded in evading us, but to-morrow I shall find him. He knows I shall be there to make him my captive, but he will appear in the ceremonies just the same."

"What you have just told us is of great interest," said Stanley thoughtfully. "We had intended leaving immediately for Cuzco, but now it seems as if it would be best to remain for the feast. What do you say?"

Ted understood the implied meaning of Stanley's words instantly. Tacama would be compelled to show up at the celebration; he would not dare absent himself. Well, they would be there also; the rest was easy.

"By all means," agreed Ted. "We must stay for the feast."

CHAPTER VIII

IN PURSUIT OF TACAMA

THE Hotel de los Andes, at Puno, is a one-story adobe building with walls three feet thick and a red tile roof. It stands near the railroad station and faces the great upland sea.

Most of the passengers hastened from the train to the dock but a few yards distant, where the steamship *Coya* was tugging at her hawsers, steam up, and ready for the nightly voyage across the black body of water to Guaqui on the Bolivian side.

Ted and Stanley, accompanied by their new-found Peruvian friend, hastened through the shouting mob of peons soliciting jobs of carrying the passengers' baggage to the dimly lighted office of the inn. The proprietor, a Spaniard with suave manners, greeted them politely but regretted that there was no room to spare; in fact, he had been compelled to turn away many guests, he said. But after the young Peruvian had made known his identity, he reconsidered the matter and thought it might be possible to accommodate them provided they would consent to spend the night in the *corridor* and furnish their own bedding. This they gladly agreed to do. Accordingly, Vicente and Moses were despatched for the baggage, which had been left at the station.

When supper was over, the Peruvian made a brief visit to the local *alcalde*, after which he invited the two Americans to a walk along the water-front.

Lake Titicaca, dark and stern, lay rippling and

booming under the frigid starlight. A cold wind was sweeping across its broad expanse, heaping up the icy water in a succession of angry waves. Banks of fluffy white clouds scurried across the heavens; when occasionally they uncovered the face of the waning moon, the distant, snow-covered crests of the Andes flashed into view, gleaming with a dazzling white halo that softened the jagged outlines of the stupendous peaks.

The *Coya* had disappeared around a promontory of land but the chugging of her engines could still be heard; no other sound disturbed the chill silence of the night.

To the north of the lake the level plateau was dotted with myriads of small white specks like flecks of foam on the midnight ocean. These were the watch-tents of the host of Indians that had gathered to participate in the great feast of Raymi. The assembled multitude was silent as death.

"I should think they would freeze out there in the open," said Ted with a shiver. "Why don't they build fires to keep warm?"

"For three days and three nights before the celebration of the festival, it is unlawful to kindle a fire," the Peruvian explained. "The Indians do nothing but fast and pray. Even those who are unable to come here and those who arrive at the last minute observe the regulation in their homes and on the road. Tomorrow night, though, the whole plain will be sparkling with camp-fires. It will be as if the scintillating stars from above had been suddenly transferred to the earth below. And now let us get back to the hotel. We must be up before daylight or we shall miss the most solemn part of the fiesta."

Early the next morning they were awakened by the voices of the great concourse of people without. They dressed hastily and, leaving the dingy corridor, unbolted the heavy wooden doors that creaked on rusty hinges and passed into the cold outer air.

Dawn was just breaking over the level plateau. Far to the east the sky was tinted with a roseate light; against it the lofty crags and pinnacles of the mountains stood silhouetted in a series of ragged spires and notches, the upper margins softened with a vaporous, frosty glow.

The elevated plain was alive with Indians. They had left the shelter of their tents and were hurrying to a great open square in the centre of the encampment.

Ted, Stanley, and the Peruvian made their way to the edge of the crowd, together with other little parties of curious onlookers.

As the first, bright rays of the sun appeared above the mountain-tops, the whole vast assembly fell upon their faces in silent adoration of the Sun-god. Then, at a given signal, they rose in a mass and a shout of joy rang from the thousands of throats, swelling in a mighty chorus that swept through the crisp morning air with the volume of thunder. Weird instruments struck up wild, barbaric tunes, and the multitude joined in songs of praise and triumph that grew ever louder as the bright orb mounted higher in the heavens.

For an hour the tumult continued unabated. From the centre of the throng came the solemn roll of drums. That was the signal for silence and in a moment the clamor was hushed. A great concave metal disk was now uncovered and its burnished face turned toward

the sun; as the bright rays struck the shining surface they were collected and focussed in a point of intense white light on a heap of cotton, that almost immediately burst into flame.

Once more the voice of the multitude rose in a wild uproar. The Sun-god had been gracious to his children and had again given them of his fire as a sign of his pleasure. A group of women, showing by their distinctive garb that they belonged to some sacerdotal order, hurried away with the sacred flame to preserve it carefully in the temple until the next celebration of the feast of Raymi. If during the course of the year the fire was permitted to go out through the neglect of its attendants, it was taken to forebode some calamity to the people.

The throng now arranged itself in an orderly procession that wended its way to the shore of the lake. First came the great chiefs walking in the shade of canopies of bright-colored cloth carried by attendants. The lesser nobles and officials followed, dressed in their gayest apparel and vying with one another in the display of their brilliant robes and ornaments. The throng of common people followed in the rear.

"That is my man," said the Peruvian suddenly, pointing to one of the gayly bedecked figures. "I will not let him get away this time. When the procession breaks up I will be on the spot to take him prisoner."

The medicine-men followed close in the wake of lesser chiefs or *curacas*. They wore costumes exactly like the one in which Ted and Stanley had seen Tacama; their hands and faces, however, were minus the disfiguring paint.

"We are looking for an offender, too," Stanley in-

formed their companion. "He is among that crowd," pointing to the score or more of medicine-men.

The Peruvian seemed interested. "What is he guilty of?" he asked.

"Theft. He stole an article from us that we value very highly."

"If you will make out the warrant, stating exactly what was taken and the circumstances, and point out the man, it will be an easy matter to have him arrested."

"We cannot do that, because we are not sure just which one it is. I think, however, it is the one with the necklace of silver bells. Is it not possible to detain him on suspicion and search him?"

"Quite impossible. You must have him formally taken into custody first. The laws of Peru respect the right of Indians as well as of whites."

Just then the Indian in question turned for a moment and faced them. On the front of his robe was a streak of crimson paint that both the Americans at once remembered having seen on that memorable night, but the presence of which they had forgotten. Also, as his gaze fell upon them, his face assumed a deathly pallor and he hastily looked away.

"Yes, I am now sure it is he," Stanley exclaimed excitedly. "I will make out the warrant. We must get him at any cost."

"Hurry back to the alcalde of Puno, then," the Peruvian advised them. "He will make out the necessary documents."

The Americans hastened away, just as two gendarmes reported to their companion. They had been arranged for on the night before and were to assist the Peruvian in capturing his fugitive.

Upon reaching the alcalde's office, they found it deserted. Apparently the official had gone to see the festivities. They awaited his return impatiently. An hour passed; two dragged slowly by, but not until noon did the representative of the law put in his tardy appearance.

The matter was quickly arranged and, accompanied by a sergeant of police, the two hurried back to the scene of the celebration.

The concourse of Indians had now broken up into numberless small groups or clans. Each group was distinguished from the others by the different color of its ponchos or blankets, which they were wearing by thrusting the head through a hole in the centre so that the heavy woollen square drooped in folds over the shoulders. By looking at the pattern of the ponchos it was possible to tell from what part of the country its wearer had come, as a different combination of colors had been prescribed for the inhabitants of each region.

Some of the parties were slaughtering llamas and roasting the carcasses over open fires. Others were engaged in making sacrifices of fruit, flowers, grain, and chunks of meat on little altars built of stones.

Jars and pots of corn wine were in evidence everywhere. The sparkling yellow liquid had been prepared days in advance by the women. The sergeant who accompanied them explained to the Americans how the drink was made. The maize was first ground into a fine meal between two stones. Then the women chewed it thoroughly and expectorated it into the jars; the saliva changed the starch in the grain into sugar and caused fermentation to set in. Water was added, and after having been put aside a number of

days the beverage was boiled, strained, and was then ready to be served.

Scores of canoes were anchored along the border of the lake. They were constructed by tying reeds or cat-tails into bundles ten or fifteen feet long, that were thick in the middle and tapered toward the ends. By lashing a number of these rolls together, a shallow, pointed craft was produced that would support the weight of several people. A sail made of reeds woven into a mat was fastened to a pole in the centre of each canoe.

They threaded their way through the maze of humanity, in their eager search for the elusive Tacama. On this day all the Indian chiefs and nobles mingled freely with the populace, so the search for any one of them resolved itself into a difficult task.

By the time the sun was dipping low toward the western peaks, Ted and Stanley knew that their quest had been in vain. However, they would not give up the chase. The celebration was to continue two days longer. On the morrow they would redouble their efforts, hoping for better success.

When they returned to the inn, they found the young Peruvian awaiting them.

"Ah, señores," he greeted them. "All the afternoon I have been looking for you. Where have you been?"

"Searching for our man," Ted replied promptly.

"But you did not find him, of course," the Peruvian interrupted him. "When I had old Lazarro, for whom I came, safely in the *carcel*, I returned to render you what assistance I could. But nowhere could I find you, until now when it is too late."

"Too late?" both asked with apprehension.

"Yes, I am very sorry to say. For, as I was returning to the hotel, I saw your man aboard the train for Cuzco which was just leaving the station. He must have seen you, hence his hurry to get away."

"But are you sure it was he?" Stanley asked, in the vague hope that the alcalde might be mistaken.

"Positive. I am certain it was the same man you pointed out to me this morning. I know Indian faces so well that I am sure it was no other."

"Can we telegraph a description of the man ahead and have him stopped along the way?" Ted asked, under the impulse of a sudden inspiration.

"Surely. Come, I will go to the telegraph office with you."

Together they went to a small adobe hovel having an imposing sign above the doorway. "*Oficina de Telegrafo Nacional*," read the sign in bold blue letters.

The operator, a little old man of wizened appearance, rose politely as they entered.

"*Si, señores*," he said, "at your service."

"We should like to send a telegram to Juliaca immediately, in time to be delivered before the arrival of the Cuzco train. It is a matter of great importance," the Peruvian said.

"I am very sorry, but the lines are all down," the telegrapher explained apologetically. "There was a landslide in the sierra."

The Peruvian shrugged his shoulders in deprecation. Ted and Stanley looked at one other in keen disappointment.

"Our only chance of overtaking him now is to go to Cuzco," Stanley said.

"Well, it's lucky for us he did not take the boat and go in the other direction," Ted consoled himself.

"Cuzco is right on our line of travel anyway, so we will lose no time in going there."

The next train left early the following morning. That night the wind-swept plateau was converted into a sea of raging humanity vying with the angry roar of the storm-tossed Lake Titicaca. The quantities of chicha that had been consumed during the day began to exert their evil influence. The Indians sang, shouted, and danced around their countless campfires in rhythm with the wild music of reed flutes and other crude instruments.

"Better not go out there among them to-night," the owner of the inn advised the two Americans as they gazed curiously at the dark forms surging and reeling around the numberless blazes. "Ordinarily they are docile enough, but on a night like this——"

They were content to follow this advice, and, after watching the weird performance a short time longer, from a distance, retired to the corridor for the night.

The journey to Cuzco occupied the greater part of the following day. The name of the city means centre or hub, and was given to it by the Incas because it was the seat of their government; from it the life of the nation emanated; toward it a continuous stream of faithful subjects flowed, laden with precious offerings for the great king. It was there that the golden wedge carried by Manco Capac, the first Inca, sank into the ground of its own accord, signifying that the spot was sacred; therefore the magnificent Temple of the Sun was erected on the hallowed ground and the city sprang into existence around it.

Stanley and Ted spent several days wandering about the city, which is of large size. They frequented the plazas and the market-places, the railroad station and

the *tambos* or shelters where the Quichuas gathered daily in large numbers, in the hope of running across Tacama. First they had enlisted the aid of the local *alcalde*, and had also provided themselves with documents authorizing them to arrest the fugitive on sight provided they turned him over to the proper authorities immediately afterward.

They saw many things to interest or amuse them. Instead of a city of wonderful ruins, they found a rabble of low, mean hovels built upon the massive stone foundations of ancient temples and palaces that had been despoiled by the greed of the conquerors and their descendants. Some of the masonry was still intact, it is true. But the greater part of it had been ruthlessly demolished, and the finely hewn material carted or dragged away to be used for more lowly purposes.

Long caravans of llamas, laden with the produce of field and mine, filed into the market-places daily. Some of the animals wore tassels of bright-colored yarn in their perforated ears; others were bedecked with bells or had gaudy little bows and fringes tied in their long wool. They were curious creatures, suspicious of any stranger that chanced to come near them. Their manner of showing resentment was to stand and whimper until they had been approached to within ten feet; then they spat with unerring aim into the face of the intruder. However, in the hands of their Indian drivers they were docile enough, so long as they were not overburdened. Each one carried a pack weighing one hundred pounds; if this amount was increased ever so slightly, the animal would sink down on the trail and refuse to move until the extra weight had been removed.

The Quichua drivers had a curious way of tying up the stupid creatures. When it was desired to keep them standing in one place for any length of time, they were herded into a compact mass with all the heads in the centre of it. A long rope was then passed around the erected necks; by merely ducking their heads they could all have escaped, but the llamas possess so little intelligence that this never occurred to them.

One afternoon the two Americans visited the great fortress of Cuzco situated to the north of the city, and built in ancient times to protect the capital from the invasion of savage hordes that sought to overwhelm the domains of the Incas. It is said that twenty thousand men spent fifty years in building the great structure.

The fortress consisted of three separate towers, one fitted up in a magnificent manner for the occupation of the Inca in time of siege; the other two were reserved for the nobles of his household who commanded the garrisons. Subterranean galleries connected the towers with the palaces in the city.

Three walls, each twelve hundred feet long and over twenty feet high, protected the advances to the fortress from the open country beyond. They were built of stones some of which weighed twenty-five tons, held together without cement but fitted so accurately that it was impossible to insert the blade of a knife between them.

"Think of building such structures with only stone hammers and fibre ropes to work with. It does not seem possible," said Stanley in admiration of the stupendous work.

"This is certainly one of the wonders of the world,"

Ted answered in awed tones. "The Incas must have been a wonderful people."

"Some authorities say all this was here when the first Inca came, and that it was built by a prehistoric race thousands of years before his time."

"That makes it all the more remarkable. But how can any one tell who is responsible for all this and when it was constructed?" Ted wanted to know.

"No one can tell exactly, but they can *guess* by comparing this type of architecture with that in use when the Spaniards came over," Stanley replied. "It is also impossible to tell exactly where the first Inca came from, but every explorer who discovers the ruins of a new city tries to prove that that was the place so as to make his find appear as important as possible; the curious thing about it is that there are always good grounds to support these claims, but positive proof is of course impossible to find."

"But didn't the Incas leave any written documents that throw light on the subject?"

"No. Strange as it seems, a nation of such advanced civilization had not invented a system of written letters or symbols. That accounts for a good deal of the controversy."

"Well," said Ted, "the fact remains that the walls and the fortress are here. Somebody built them; there must have been a good reason or they would not have gone to all the trouble. I'll take off my hat to whoever did."

They spent some time wandering around the salients of the walls, exploring some of the dark passages opening into the fortress, and speculating upon the tales of battles and struggles between the ancient peoples that the stones could tell could they but talk.

Rounding one of the abrupt corners suddenly, they came in sight of a little party of Indians of weird appearance, squatted on the ground and listening attentively to one of their number who was addressing them, accompanying his speech with numerous and emphatic gestures. The speaker was Tacama; his garb had been changed, but his face—they needed no second look to convince themselves that it was he.

Fortunately, the Indians were so absorbed in listening to the orator, that they had not seen Ted and Stanley, who immediately slid back around the protecting corner, and quietly followed along the other side of the wall until they reached a spot directly in the rear of the little group. Through a loophole in the masonry they could now hear what was being said.

"In Puno they spied upon me and I barely succeeded in escaping them," he was saying. "Now they have followed me here. I have come to you, brethren of the ancient and sacred order, for help and protection. You must contrive to detain them until I can start in safety on a long journey to a place to which they cannot follow me."

"You go around that way and I will go this way," Stanley whispered. "Wait until you see me come around the corner, then we can both slip along the wall slowly toward them until we are discovered. We will rush them from both ends. Ignore the others and make for Tacama. He will be ours this time without fail."

Ted waited at his end of the wall until Stanley appeared at the other. Then they both began to stalk the Indians.

They had arrived to within fifty feet of the little party when Tacama suddenly looked up, saw Stan-



Fortunately, the Indians were so absorbed in listening to the orator,
that they had not seen Ted and Stanley

ley, and gave a wild cry of alarm. But instead of making a dash across the level court in front of the wall as the Americans had expected, the Indians sprang to their feet and scurried into the dark entrance of an underground passage that opened into the base of the stonework, like so many rats.

When Ted and Stanley reached the spot, they found the hole securely blocked by a great boulder that had been rolled into place from below.

CHAPTER IX

CROSSING THE ANDEAN HIGHLANDS

THE attempt to capture Tacama in the thickly settled highland region seemed like a hopeless undertaking. Among the many thousands of his own people, it was an easy matter for him to find an abundance of places in which to hide until his pursuers left the locality; or he could quietly depart for other regions in the event that his discovery appeared likely, without their ever learning of it.

Twice had they run across the wily death-doctor by chance; each time he had succeeded in evading them. It was not probable that they should catch sight of him again.

"There is no use in staying around here any longer," Stanley said as they returned from the fortress late on the afternoon of their second meeting with Tacama. "The fortifications are undermined with a perfect labyrinth of passages, so we could never bottle him up and catch him in there."

"He said he was about to leave on a long journey, anyway," said Ted. "Going to the cave, of course. I suppose there isn't much doubt now as to his having the ring."

"Not a bit. It is barely possible that he may be trying to keep away from us because he is afraid we shall identify him to the police, and tell what we saw in the hut that night when he was trying to do away with Yupanqui. But I'd wager almost anything that his real reason for dodging us is that he knows we sus-

pect him of having stolen the ring, and are trying to get it back again. Our only hope now is to get to the cave first and wait for him there; and when he shows up it will be an easy matter to overpower him. It is taking a long chance, I know, and we may never see him again. What do you say?"

"I say, yes by all means. Even if we do not get back the ring we can explore the route, and find out whether or not the old chief was telling the truth. If it seems worth while, we can organize a larger expedition, later and look for some other entrance into the valley," said Ted enthusiastically.

"That is exactly the way I feel about it. And even if there should be no valley at all, the trip through the tropical jungle will be an experience never to be forgotten. We shall see all kinds of queer animals and people, perhaps. There will doubtless be hardships and even dangers, but we expected that before we left home. Nothing worth while is ever gained without work and risks."

They hurried back to the city and, with the help of Vicente and Moses, spent a part of the night, and the following day, in going over their belongings and arranging the packs they were to take with them.

"Shall we get llamas or mules for the first part of the trip?" Ted asked as they were carefully examining each article to assure themselves that it was in serviceable condition.

"Personally, I am in favor of not bothering with them," Stanley replied. "It will be an added expense, and in the end the beaten trails may not take us anywhere near the route we want to follow. We are taking only the most necessary things so the packs will not be very heavy. Let's start right off walking."

The problem of what to take on a journey of this kind was far from easy to solve. Each pound would be just that much more weight to carry; at the same time, they did not want to leave behind a single article for which there might be urgent need later. They asked Vicente for suggestions, and after a good deal of planning and thinking, the following list was decided upon:

Two rifles and two hundred rounds of ammunition.

Four pounds of black powder and three yards of slow fuse, to use in blowing up stumps containing the nests of wild bees, in the event they found any. The honey thus secured would be a welcome addition to their food supply. Vicente suggested dynamite, but the powder, they decided, would be safer to carry.

Four machetes, or long brush knives. Without them it would be impossible to traverse the jungle. There was one knife for each member of the party; it was to be carried in a leather scabbard hanging from the belt.

One aluminum cooking kit, cups and plates.

Two folding canvas pails.

A small japanned tin box of assorted medicines.

Two towels and an assortment of toilet articles.

A kodak and three dozen rolls of films. (The cameras were to be left in Cuzco; they were too heavy to take along.)

A small lot of photographic supplies.

Four hammocks and nets.

Four blankets.

Several extra pairs of heavy woollen socks for Ted and Stanley. Moses and Vicente wore sandals on their bare feet.

A map of the region.

Enough tinned meat, salt, biscuit, and other provisions to bring the total weight of all the things up to one hundred and forty pounds, or thirty-five pounds for each man.

The clothing they wore would have to last them until their return. By that time it would doubtless be in tatters, but carrying along an extra supply was not to be thought of.

"We can wash our things ever so often," Ted said as they were discussing the matter. "This khaki is of an unusually heavy grade, and ought to stand pretty rough treatment. The shoes and leggings, too, will wear well. How long do you think we shall be gone?"

"I wish I knew. I should say three to five months, though, as a guess."

"We haven't food enough for that length of time, but doubtless we shall be able to pick up game as we go along," Ted said. "I can hardly wait to get started."

"Before we go," suggested Stanley, "suppose we have a talk with Moses and Vicente. We should explain to them that we are going into an unknown country, and that we may meet with hazards before we get out again. As they will have to share our luck with us, it is only fair to tell them in advance."

"Are you going to let them know why we are making the trip?"

"We need not go into detail. Vicente knows already, because unfortunately it got out in Panama that we were going to Peru to look for the hidden trea-

sure of the Incas. But they need not know about the valley until we get there. We can simply tell them that we are hunting for gold. There is nothing extraordinary about that. If we are successful, they will have a share in the proceeds. If not, we shall only pay them the twenty dollars a month agreed upon."

"I think," said Ted, "we should also decide upon some way in which to treat the two on the trip."

"The only way to act toward anybody is, to treat them as you would like to be treated if you were in their place. In an undertaking of this sort, one can not stand on much ceremony. Working together under distressing circumstances makes men more or less equal; still, we must let them know what is expected of them, and insist firmly that they uphold their end of the game. Needless to say, we must be absolutely square in all our dealings with them, and show them that we can and will do anything we expect them to do. Then we shall have no trouble."

They called in the Ecuadorian and the negro and explained the situation to them. Vicente agreed eagerly with everything they said, and expressed the wish that they might start immediately. Moses was more cautious, asked many questions, but finally said he would accompany them wherever they went.

Leaving the ancient capital, the little party made their way across the upland valley, keeping their faces toward the rising sun. The valley was densely populated. Scattered huts of stone or adobe dotted the landscape far as the eye could see. They were surrounded by cultivated fields divided into irregular areas by stone fences. Potatoes, corn, beans, and numerous other plants grew luxuriantly under the

skilled hands of the Indians. Canals and aqueducts bringing water from distant mountain streams supplied the moisture without which the whole region would have been a desolate waste.

Flocks of goats, sheep and llamas fed on the sparse grass that covered the occasional knolls and grew in the limited spots not given to cultivation.

The inhabitants were a stolid lot and paid no attention to the travellers. When darkness came, it was possible to secure admittance to any one of the hovels for the night by the payment of a small sum to the owner. Eggs, cheese, goats' milk, and round cakes of brown bread made of coarse, whole wheat flour and having a sweetish taste, could always be purchased for a few centavos.

Vicente did all the bargaining with the natives. He suddenly showed a remarkable knowledge of their language.

"Where did you learn to speak Quichua?" Ted asked in surprise.

"In the rubber forests of the Putumayo."

"I didn't know it was spoken there. I thought the Indian tribes of the low country had their own languages."

"There were many men from the uplands around Quito in the camps. They all use Quichua. One had to learn it or go without talking, as they refused to converse in Spanish."

Beyond the thickly settled region, the country rises rapidly in a series of steppes or flat shelves of wide extent, mounting one above the other until a great elevation is reached. They are covered with tall, wiry grass, and clumps of a plant resembling mullein. The leaves of the latter are thick and velvety, and made

soft beds for the wanderers; the stems burned well and provided them with fuel for cooking.

At night the cold was intense, and ice half an inch thick formed in the pot-holes in the little gullies. During the daytime, the heat was so great that it scorched and blistered the hands and faces of the men. In fact, the thermometer varied from fifty to one hundred degrees in the course of each twenty-four hours.

From all sides came the cheery little song of white-throated sparrows that made this uninviting region their home. They started up from almost underneath the feet of the men, flew a short distance, and then perched on a swaying weed and sang as if their hearts were bubbling over with joy. One of them, however, fluttered along the ground, emitting distressed little chirps, and alighting near by, stretched its neck and looked at the intruders with alarm.

Stanley carefully parted the grass in the spot from which the bird had flushed. A neat, cup-shaped nest made of grass-stems and lined with fibres was exposed to view; in it were three naked baby birds that raised their wobbly heads and opened wide their yellow mouths.

"Did you ever see anything so ugly before?" Ted asked, with an amused smile.

"Well, they are not exactly handsome," Stanley replied. "But think of the possibilities that are covered up by their scrawny little hides. A redbird or a thrush is just as ugly when it hatches; but only a few short months later it is helping brighten the world with its color and song."

He released the grass so that it sprang back into place and formed a protecting canopy over the young birds.

"Now you can come back," he called to the excited little sparrow that was twittering and hovering but a few yards away. "Take good care of them; there can't be too many of you here. What a desolate region this would be without you!"

Straight ahead they saw small black specks in the distant sky. Vicente saw them looking intently at these objects, which they were mistaking for vultures.

"Those are condors," he said. "The biggest birds in all South America."

"We are lucky to see so many of them. I had always read that the condor is a very rare bird. There must be twenty over there," Stanley exclaimed with interest.

"There are not very many now," Vicente said. "But sometimes when there is a large dead animal in the mountains, they come from many miles away to feed on it. They generally eat small live animals if they can get them, in preference to dead ones, but——"

"I wish we could have a good look at one," Ted interrupted. "Perhaps we may when we get over there."

Had Ted known of the surprise that awaited them, he might have been satisfied with this distant view of the great, powerful birds.

Toward evening they reached the foot of a rocky slope that led to the next and last steppe. Numerous little tunnels and burrows had been dug between and under the rocks, and well-worn paths led from the openings to the grassy stretch below.

"We might as well camp here for the night," said Stanley, throwing down his pack. "The slope will shelter us from the cold wind, and we may be able

to pick up a few rabbits for supper. 'Live on the country whenever we can' must be our motto."

They left Moses and Vicente to prepare camp, while the two strolled some distance along the foot of the incline in the hope of seeing a rabbit. However, they saw nothing.

"Perhaps we are making too much noise," Ted suggested. "Let's sit down on a rock and watch."

They had not long to wait. A furry ball appeared noiselessly in the entrance of one of the burrows. It sat stock-still, looking at the men with bright black eyes. Ted slowly raised his rifle. Seeing this movement, the creature sat up on its haunches, and emitted a quick succession of deep grunts; incidentally, it also afforded a fine target, and Ted quickly pulled the trigger.

"It isn't a rabbit, and it isn't a squirrel," said Ted exultantly as he picked up the dead animal. Stanley looked in surprise.

The creature was twice the size of a cottontail, covered with heavy blue-gray fur, had long ears, and resembled a rabbit in every way but one—it had a fluffy, squirrel-like tail that was longer than its body.

"I haven't the slightest idea what its proper name is, but it must be some kind of a rabbit. Look, they are coming out all around us."

In the fading light, other dusky forms were now visible, scurrying from their hiding-places to the long grass that covered the flat place in front of them. Occasionally one stopped a moment, sat up, and looked around. At each report of the rifle the animals dashed back into their burrows, only to appear again in a few minutes.

When they had bagged four, the men started back to camp.

"These will last several days," Stanley said enthusiastically. "That is a pretty good start. We could get more, but by the time these are eaten we will be tired of the meat, and something else will doubtless turn up."

On the way, they came to a place where the animals were more numerous than before. However, they were all of small size—in fact, not one-fourth as large as the ones they were carrying.

"This is interesting. The young seem to live in a colony all alone as soon as they are able to shift for themselves."

"That is peculiar. I never heard of any species of animal with that habit before," Ted said.

When they neared the blazing camp-fire, Vicente came to meet them. It was now too dark to see distinctly, but they heard the patter of little feet all around them.

Vicente looked at their trophies eagerly. "Those are viscachas," he said, "and they are very delicious. But why didn't you shoot some of the chinchillas too? Their skins are worth a fortune, and there are hundreds of them here."

"Chinchillas?" Ted asked. "Why, a trapper would think himself in luck if he caught two or three in a whole year. Here we can get all we can carry, in a few weeks."

"So the small animals were chinchillas, and not young—what did you call these?"

"Viscachas."

"Viscachas. I am glad we did not know it," said Stanley with decision. "Because if we had, we might

have been tempted to shoot some of them. We are not prepared to collect pelts, and besides, we have a much more important thing to do right now. It is a good thing to know about the existence of this colony, though; if our other scheme fails, we have this to fall back on. Trapping and hunting up here would be great fun. Maybe we shall come back here again some day with a suitable outfit; then the chinchillas had better look out."

The viscachas were fat and savory and were good eating, both stewed and roasted. Vicente even boiled the heads and said they were the best part of the whole animal, but the others were content to take his word for it, and did not ask him to share these morsels with them. As they ate their supper, they heard the shrill cry of a mountain-lion about to start on his nightly hunt. They could imagine seeing the big, tawny brute sneaking along the foot of the slope and pouncing upon the luckless viscachas and chinchillas as they went to and from their domiciles. They also saw the black form of what was unmistakably a bear outlined for an instant on the upper edge of the slope.

"We must come back here again to hunt and trap," Stanley said quietly, "whether we get the hidden gold or not. It would be as exciting as a winter in the North Woods, and far more interesting because it has not been done often before."

"That's a bargain," Ted replied. "I am going to remind you of it some day. It may be several years from now, but back we are certainly coming, sooner or later, and to this very spot."

Noon of the next day found the party on the edge of a deep though narrow canyon. That meant a descent of two thousand feet, crossing the roaring torrent that

raged through the bottom of the cut, and clambering up again on the other side—provided a spot could be found where it would be possible to find a footing on the faces of the abrupt walls.

"I can't see any way to get down here," Stanley said, peering over the rim. "The side looks straight up and down."

Ted joined him, and together they scanned the gaping abyss below them. It must have been intuition that caused them to draw back with a start just as the black form of a great bird swooped down upon them on motionless pinions. Their action evidently upset the bird's calculation, for it swept past, barely missing their heads, and with a *wush* swerved down into the canyon.

Stanley and Ted narrowly missed being knocked over the edge, and for a moment they were speechless.

"Ugh! If we had been a second slower, we should have been dashed to pieces on the rocks below," Ted panted.

"You wanted a close view of a condor. I hope you are satisfied now."

"I knew they carried off young sheep and llamas, and it has been said that they take small children if they are left alone out in the fields; but I never heard of their attacking grown people as well."

"Look out! he comin' back," Moses yelled, quickly drawing his machete from the scabbard, and assuming a position from which he could strike the bird if it swooped low enough.

This one, however, was a second individual. It was larger and blacker than the other; the spread of its wings must have been seven or eight feet. It had a snowy-white ruff around the base of its neck.

Onward it came, with the speed of an express-train, soaring without a quiver of the enormous wings. As they raised their machetes to ward off the attack, the bird turned aside and shot past just out of range. The first now appeared and joined its mate. Together, they wheeled and circled above the men in a threatening manner, moving their bare, vulture-like heads from side to side, and eying the party with suspicion and resentment.

As they turned gracefully in mid-air, standing almost on the tip of one wing in order to accomplish the feat, the white ruff of the male and the gray-white shoulders of both birds gleamed and flashed in the sunlight.

"They must have a nest here. You watch, and I'll crawl to the edge and look down. Call to me if they get too close," Stanley said.

Ted kept his eyes on the circling birds while his companion cautiously crept to the brink of the canyon.

"It's here," Stanley shouted after a few minutes. "Right below. There is an egg in it, too. Get out the kodak and come on. Vicente and Moses can watch, and anyway, the birds can't knock us off if we lie flat."

Ted did as he was asked. Slowly worming his way to the edge, kodak in hand, he too looked down. Not thirty feet below, on a little shelf of rock, lay an oval white object of very large size. It was the egg of a condor. Around it were a few feathers that had been shed by the old birds; also, heaps of the bones of small animals. This site must have been used again and again by the condors throughout a period of many years; no wonder they guarded it so jealously.

"I know of naturalists who would give a year of their lives for a sight like this," Stanley said, greatly pleased over their discovery. "And here we stumble

across it without trying. Few people have ever had the same luck."

Ted pointed the kodak downward and made a number of exposures. "I took them at various speeds," he explained. "So if one is not good, the other is sure to be. A clear photograph of a condor's nest will be something to be proud of. I doubt if there is another one in existence."

They left the spot reluctantly, and no sooner had they gone than the old birds swooped down into the canyon, rejoicing no doubt at finding their treasure undisturbed.

It was necessary to make a long d  tour before they found a place where the walls of the cut were less steep. Picking their way down to the bed of the river consumed the remainder of the afternoon, and they spent the night on the margin of the rapid stream, lulled to sleep by the echoing roar that was flung back and forth between the high, dark walls.

Two o'clock of the next afternoon found them on the top of the opposite side of the canyon. Before them lay a level plateau on the far side of which stretched a chain of low peaks with glittering snow-patches dotting their slopes. They headed directly for the lowest and less abrupt of the rises. Walking at that high altitude—the aneroid registered thirteen thousand feet—was exhausting work, and they had to stop to rest frequently; by dint of ceaseless effort, however, they were able to reach the base of the mound in time to make camp before dark.

Vicente awakened the two Americans just at day-break. He seemed strangely agitated.

"Look, *se  ores*, look!" he cried, pointing to three long black feathers sticking in the ground in front of the spot where they had been sleeping. In the centre

of the triangle formed by these tapering primaries of a condor's wing, lay the skull of a viscacha.

"That is an evil sign," Vicente continued impressively.

Ted and Stanley looked perplexed.

"Who put it there?" Stanley demanded. "And what does it mean?"

"When I woke up, I saw a man disappear up the mountainside. He was looking back in this direction as if afraid of our waking up and seeing him. He must have been an Indian."

"Where was he when you first saw him?" Ted asked.

"Over that way—I do not remember exactly on which, it was one of those two," Vicente replied with evident confusion, pointing to the peaks.

"That's funny. Seems to me you could remember a thing like that if you really saw somebody. What do the feathers and bones mean?"

"It is an old Quichua way of saying there is danger ahead, and to be careful," Vicente explained. "The Indian who put it there does not want us to go further, but I would not pay any attention to him."

Stanley looked at Ted meaningly.

"Some more of Tacama's work," he whispered. Then, aloud: "No, we will not pay any attention to it. It will take more than that to scare us. I am glad you are in favor of going on, too, Vicente, for that is certainly what we shall do."

"Yes, *señor*," said Vicente eagerly. "We are four to his one, so I am glad we are not turning back. I want to go ahead as fast as possible."

A half-hour later they were mounting the gentle slope.

CHAPTER X

FIGHTING THE TROPICAL JUNGLE

FROM the top of one of the chain of peaks forming the rim of the lofty plateau, they had their first view of the Amazon country to the east and, indeed, of forest of any kind. The mighty range broke down in a succession of steep slopes; at its base rose clumps of low foot-hills, stretching north and south as far as the eye could see. To the east extended the vast Amazonian jungle, a perfect ocean of deepest green that finally lost itself in the purplish haze of the horizon.

"I had no idea the world was so big," said Stanley, after spending some time silently admiring the grandeur of the awe-inspiring scene before them.

"Or that man was so infinitely small," said Ted. "What are we, anyway, compared to the immense scale on which nature has been created! If every person in the world were to die to-day, the sun would shine to-morrow just the same as if nothing had happened. One of these grains of sand is more important than we are."

"In a physical sense, yes, perhaps, but how about the other?"

"Suh?" said Moses, who had been listening almost reverently to the conversation. Evidently the topic was too deep for his understanding.

"But what's the use of talking?" continued Ted. "We have work ahead and, more to the point, it con-

sists of getting down there and crossing at least a part of that lower world we see."

"It doesn't look like the easiest job in the world, either," added Stanley. "And in the end we may find that all our trouble was for nothing."

"Don't say that," Ted advised. "Think of the experience it will give us. Nothing is ever lost that adds to our store of knowledge; and if a trip of this kind isn't worth while for its own sake, few things in the world are."

Shouldering their packs, they started down at a brisk pace. At first the slope was very similar to the plateau above which they had just left—so far as its vegetation was concerned. Long, wiry grass, thick-leaved frailejones and blueberry bushes, with scattered clumps of dwarfed pines, covered the mountainside. Soon, however, the upper edge of the forest zone was reached.

Before reaching the jungle proper, they encountered large areas covered with tall ferns, evergreens, and climbing bamboo. Occasionally there was a patch of grass each blade of which was six or eight feet tall and four inches broad; the edges were sharp and cut the hands and faces of the men as they forced their way through the green thickets. There were also shrubs covered with gorgeous crimson flowers about which humming-birds, like flecks of ruby and amber flame, buzzed and fluttered.

All day long they fought their way through the merciless growths, using their machetes at frequent intervals to clear the way. Late afternoon found them within the border of the real forest. Now the difficulties hindering their advance multiplied so rapidly that they seemed overwhelming.

The wall of trees closed about them completely.

Palms, tree-ferns, and a host of other plants springing from the ground formed a solid, matted mass that reared itself upward into the lower branches of the giant trees. Each trunk, each twig, even the leaves, were covered with moss that hung in shaggy manes or stood upright in graceful, fluffy tufts. On the larger branches, orchids were perched in rows, like birds, their delicately tinted blossoms giving a touch of color to the dismal green of the other vegetation.

Here and there a tangle of lianas or vines drooped in snakelike coils and festoons from the interwoven aerial gardens overhead. Some of them were smooth and round; others were flattened and notched their entire length, so that they reminded the men of ladders—in fact, Vicente called them monkey ladders, and stated that monkeys actually used them as such.

The sunlight never penetrated into this riot of struggling plant-life. The wild creatures that made it their home were doomed to spend their lives in perpetual gloom and semidarkness.

"I hate to think what the low-country jungle will be like when it is so thick up here on the slope," Ted said as they unslung their packs for the night's halt.

"From all the accounts I have read, one finds the densest forest in the world at this altitude," Stanley informed him. "It will be a great deal more open in the hot, tropical lowlands."

"I should think that just the opposite were true. We are up exactly ten thousand feet now," said Ted, looking at the aneroid, "and it is cold here. Seems to me like the hot country must be better suited to the growth of plant-life than this."

"The great amount of moisture is what causes things to thrive so luxuriantly. It rains a good deal, but,

more important than that, the mountainsides are almost continually enveloped in clouds, so that everything becomes soaked. Just take a handful of that moss—it is as full of water as a sponge. The cold is not intense enough ever to freeze; most plants, even the finest orchids, thrive in a cool climate.”

About the only sound that disturbed the deep silence of the forest was the constant *drip, drip* of water from the saturated masses overhead. Huge drops were falling at intervals everywhere.

“Now if we only had a tent,” began Stanley. “We could put in a good night’s rest, and be ready for an early start in the morning.”

“But as it is,” Ted continued for him, “we will sleep out in the open and get thoroughly drenched and—start early in the morning anyway.”

“No, señores, that is not necessary,” said Vicente, who was standing near by. “The forest is full of tents. All they need is a little fixing up.”

“Huh,” came from Moses, “I doan see no tents. That man doan know what he talk.”

Vicente gave the negro a look of superiority and cut his way to the nearest tree. The base looked to be of enormous proportions, but, much to the surprise of the onlookers, when Vicente reached it he hacked a hole right into it and disappeared from view. They hastened to follow him, and then they understood what he had meant when he said “the forest is full of tents.”

The thing that gave the tree its appearance of great size was the solid mass of plants that clung to it for support. The trunk itself was not over three feet in diameter; but when Vicente had finished slashing at the moss, ferns, creepers, and climbing palms around its base, an opening fully fifteen feet across was dis-

closed, in the centre of which stood the bare tree trunk, while a foot above their heads spread the tangled green canopy, like a huge umbrella. The outer part had been cut lower than the centre, so that the water in seeping through the porous mass ran to the lowest points and dripped only along the circular edge. They were greatly pleased at this demonstration of Vicente's woodcraft, and hastened to bring the packs inside.

"Now we need water and fire-wood. That is your job, you know, Moses," Ted suggested.

"Watah they is a-plenty," Moses replied. "I kin squeeze some out of the moss. But the wood is all wet and won't buhn."

"Pig!" Vicente hurled at him sarcastically. "Who would drink water squeezed out of the moss? The señores want clean, pure water. And the wood of the taquereta-tree will burn when it is wet and green. Come with me. This one time I will show you, but never again."

"Moses and Vicente make a good team," mused Ted when the two had departed. "They get along together like a cat and dog."

"Yes," responded Stanley, with a smile. "There would be a fight every second if we were not around."

"Sometimes I think that perhaps, after all, we made a mistake in taking Vicente with us. He seems sullen and restless at times and I could almost suspect him of being treacherous."

"We shall have to keep an eye on him. It is too late to send him back now; besides, his knowledge of the forest is worth a good deal to us."

They went out of the shelter to see what their two helpers were doing.

Growing on the branches together with the orchids

and moss were clumps of wild pines, or bromelias, that looked exactly like the tuft of leaves found on the top of a pineapple only they were much larger. Vicente was carefully cutting these plants from the lower limbs, and handing them down to Moses, who turned them upside down over a pail; the vase of each leaf contained a quantity of clear water that had collected there from the rains. Only a few of the plants were needed to fill the bucket. When this had been accomplished, they started to gather fire-wood by cutting down a number of the slender taquereta-trees, resembling oak saplings, and chopping them into short pieces which they carried into the "tent."

Few birds had been seen during the course of the day's journey, and they were all too small to serve as food. This scarcity of wild life in the forest had been a source of constant surprise to them. They had pictured the jungle as teeming with animals; but their acquaintance with it had hardly begun.

"I think I'll take my rifle and go back over the trail to see if I can't pick up something for supper," said Stanley. "Coming along?"

"No," answered Ted. "You might as well save yourself the trouble. The woods are as deserted as a graveyard."

"Well," said Stanley, "there is still a little time to spend before dark, and maybe some animal or other may come out to feed, or stir around before settling down for the night. See you later," and shouldering his rifle he departed.

Ted watched Vicente build the fire. He first made a heap of shavings whittled from the taquereta, and then piled pieces of the same wood over it, being careful to leave plenty of space between them. When he

touched a match to it, the pile burned readily owing to the large amount of resin in the wood. The tongues of flame shot up, lighting the interior of the shelter and filling it with a comfortable warmth. Vicente cut a slanting hole through the ceiling to the outer edge of the matted growth, which served as a chimney for the smoke.

"Better put the big pot on to boil," Ted advised Moses when the latter asked what they should have for supper. "Mister Stanley has gone hunting and will soon be back with a lot of game."

Moses did not know whether to look serious or amused, but he obeyed instructions nevertheless.

Long before the water began to bubble, they heard the sudden report of a rifle, followed by a dull roar as the sound tore its way through the forest.

"Put more wood on the fire," Ted ordered. "And get out the skinning knife. Have everything ready when we get back. I am going up the trail to help bring in the game."

As he started away there came another *crack*, but somewhat nearer and sharper this time. He hastened up the path, and after walking a hundred yards met Stanley homeward bound and burdened with two large black birds that looked a good deal like turkeys.

"Now aren't you sorry you didn't come along?" he greeted Ted, proudly exhibiting his trophies.

"Green with envy," replied Ted in good humor. "What in the world are they?"

"Guans, I think, and the best eating in the world. Just feel their weight; fat as butter-balls."

Ted examined the birds admiringly. "Tell me how you got them," he said.

"Nothing very remarkable about that. They must

have been going home to roost," Stanley explained. "I simply saw them fluttering among the higher branches and potted them. There were six or eight in the flock, but two are enough for us, so I left the others. They are stupid birds and easy to kill."

"I hope we shall run across them often, then."

They reached camp just before dark, and Moses, his black face beaming in joyful anticipation of a good meal, immediately plunged the birds into the hot water, after which he picked off the feathers.

"Yo suttently is a good hunter, Mistah Stanley," he commented. "If ever a tiger or an Indian comes fo' me, I want yo' right in front of me. I shall boil one fowl fo' suppah an' roas' the other to carry along to-morrow."

"Good idea, and make it fast—I'm starving."

"I too," agreed Ted; "and put a little rice with it for soup, so we can all fill up."

"Yes, suh," said Moses; "they'll be'a-plenty fo' all."

That night it rained—not in torrents, but a light though steady fall of water that was absorbed by the upper layers of the thick vegetation, and slowly made its way down to the ground in countless little rivulets; but the snug retreat that Vicente had prepared for them remained dry and comfortable.

The next day they found the forest even denser than on the previous afternoon. In spots it was necessary to cut a tunnel underneath the matted growth, through which they crawled on hands and knees.

To add to the difficulties, they discovered that the slope did not lead downward in an unbroken stretch. From above it had looked as if the mountainside extended toward the low, level country in an uninterrupted sweep, but now they encountered deep ravines

and gullies down which raging brooks dashed over rock-strewn beds. Crossing the streams was an easy matter, as they were narrow and the numerous rocks bridged them with stepping-stones; however, letting themselves down into the steep cuts and clambering up again on the other side was hard work, and took up a great deal of time.

They took turns at leading the procession and cutting the trail as they slowly made their way through the jungle in single file. It was Stanley's turn to wield the machete.

"For the love of Mike and Moses and all the other apostles!" he exclaimed, stopping short before a bunched-up, gray object that was hanging suspended from a branch directly in front of him. "I saw it just in time. One more stroke and I should have hit it square in the middle."

The others, who were a short distance behind, hurried up to see what he was talking about.

"*Perico ligero*," said Vicente, with a show of interest.,

"Which means 'swift dog,' and is a fine name to call a sloth."

The animal, which would have filled a bushel bag, evidently objected to being disturbed, for it slowly uncurled itself and began to move away. Instead of walking upright on a branch like a squirrel or monkey, it was swinging with its body toward the ground, the long claws with which its toes were provided serving as hooks. It was covered with long gray hair, tinged with green along the spine where particles of moss clung. The head was small, with a blunt nose and gray-brown eyes.

"Looks like a big teddy bear," said Stanley.

"And has just about as much life," added Ted. "Don't they ever move any faster than that?"

"Of course not—why should they? All they have to do is cling to the limbs and eat the leaves that are growing all around them. The thick vegetation hides them from above, and the moss growing on their back is such a good camouflage that it is impossible to see them from below, so why shouldn't they take life easy?"

So saying, Stanley prodded the sluggish creature with the end of his rifle. Instantly it became charged with life. One of the armed paws shot out with such speed and force that the gun was knocked out of Stanley's hand; at the same time it quickly turned its head and opening its mouth emitted a loud, snakelike hiss.

"I guess we had better not get too familiar with this fellow," said Stanley, picking up the rifle, which had fallen on the wet moss. "Looks like he can fight if necessary, and I should hate to get in the way of those dagger-like claws."

"You would know he can fight if you had tried to stop that wicked little uppercut of his. He could rip you wide open."

"He will not have another chance. Come on, now. Get out of the way. We don't want to hurt you, but we are losing a lot of time."

They watched the sloth leisurely swing itself to the very tip of the branch, and when it had curled up for another nap they continued on their journey.

It was not until three days later that they succeeded in leaving the main range of the Andes behind, and emerged into the comparatively open forest of the low country. Ahead of them lay a string of hills but a few hundred feet in height; they had seen them occasionally from some opening on the slope above. In

obedience to the dying chief's injunction to stay among the foot-hills, they made no attempt to cross or even reach the base of the low ridge, but followed in a northerly direction the narrow depression that lay between it and the high mountains they had just crossed.

The trees rose to a height of a hundred and fifty feet above their heads, but there was practically no underbrush to impede their progress, which was therefore rapid. In places groves of lofty palms replaced the forest trees; they were giants of their kind, with leaves sixty feet long and forty feet wide; others bore crowns of short, stiff fronds that resembled a bunch of fans, while the foliage of a third species drooped down like graceful ostrich plumes. The trunks and branches were clean and free from the moss, orchids, and other plants with which everything on the slope was covered.

"This is wonderful, wonderful," exclaimed Stanley, when they had halted for the second night's rest in a particularly beautiful spot. "How different from the cold and the rain and that awful cloud forest!"

"You may wish yourself back up there again before long. It gets terribly hot down here," said Ted.

"That's right. Take all the joy out of life."

"If that is what you call telling the plain truth, I might as well keep it up. I just remembered what old Yupanqui told us about this place."

"What was that?" asked Stanley.

"Well, he said to travel at night only, after we reached the land of the monkey-men," Ted replied.

"Did you just remember that?" asked Stanley in feigned surprise. "I have been thinking of it all the time."

"Then why did we travel all day long to-day?"

"Probably because we were too enthusiastic and in too big a hurry to overtake Tacama. We ought to reach some decision on that point, though. What do you say?"

"Personally I am in favor of going ahead in the daytime. Picking our way through the forest at night would not be an easy job."

"Come to think of it, if I remember correctly, the old chief said to be careful only after we had crossed the big river. He said nothing about this side of it."

"I remember now, he did say that," agreed Ted. "So we might as well go along as we have in the past, at least until we see some sign of Indians. I have been thinking of another thing this evening."

"How busy your mind has been to-day!"

"I mean it," said Ted earnestly. "The further we get into this country the smaller our chances seem."

"Why, I never heard you talk like that before," exclaimed Stanley in astonishment.

Ted ignored this remark. "I can't see that there is the slightest possibility of our running into Tacama and recovering our ring," he said. "It's like hunting for a needle in a haystack."

"I thought we had settled that long ago. Our plan was to reach the cave first and wait for the thief there. It should be easy for us to overpower him and get back our stolen property. You are not thinking of turning back, are you?"

"No, I guess not. That is, not exactly," said Ted faintly.

"What is the matter, anyhow?" asked Stanley, rising from the log on which he had been seated and

going over to Ted. "I was having a great time up to a few minutes ago, and I thought you were too."

"It must be the way I feel," said Ted. And Stanley for the first time noticed that his companion's face was pale and drawn.

"That explains everything," exclaimed Stanley anxiously. "Tell me, what is the trouble?"

"A while ago I had a chill, now I am burning up."

"Terribly sorry, but it sounds like malaria. You must have picked it up on the lower slope; but I think we can fix you all right. We shall have to be careful now never to sleep without our nets. One little mosquito can cause a lot of trouble."

Stanley arranged a bed of the blankets and made Ted as comfortable as possible.

"There is no use giving you quinine until later," he said. "It will have no effect while the fever lasts. You simply take it easy and watch Moses get the things straightened out. I will take Vicente and see if we can pick up a good supper for you."

Though far from well, Ted believed that he had little to fear from the malaria with which he had become inoculated, provided he took the proper steps to combat it in time; and this he would of course do.

However, the illness did make him feel dejected and miserable. He was sorry for the way he had acted, but he knew that Stanley would understand.

Moses chopped wood and built a fire at the base of a buttressed ceiba-tree. The draft between the bracket-shaped roots drew the smoke up as through a chimney. Next, the negro cut notches in the edges of the roots, and hung the pots on sticks which he placed with their ends resting in the notches. Then he swung

the hammocks between the trees, and carefully tied the mosquito nets above them.

By the time this had been accomplished, Stanley and Vicente returned from their hunt. They had been successful in securing a pair of forest partridges, or tinamou, that were the size and shape of guinea hens, but of a deep-chestnut color.

"Vicente says these are the best of all the forest birds," he greeted Ted cheerfully. "All white meat and very tender. One of these, and a little bit medicine at bedtime, will fix you up all right."

"I am sure it will," replied Ted bravely. "I know I shall be over this to-morrow."

They little thought, however, that in the malaria they had encountered a lurking foe not only as deadly as the monkey-men, but far more difficult to evade.

CHAPTER XI

TO THE LAND OF THE MONKEY-MEN

TED grew steadily worse during the night. By morning he was so ill that any attempt to continue the journey was out of the question. The attacks of chills and fever came at regular intervals, and were always preceded by a drowsy feeling.

"If I could only stretch a mile!" said Ted at the beginning of one of the spells. "There is nothing in the world I would rather do."

Then, as the chill overtook him, he shivered and trembled until his teeth chattered. Stanley covered him with all the blankets they had, but this was of no avail; in fact, the sufferer's temperature was rising rapidly all the time in spite of the feeling of intense cold. A burning sensation always followed soon after, and lasted upward of half an hour. After that Ted felt relieved, though weak, until the next attack.

Stanley administered quinine in ten-grain doses the instant the drowsiness appeared, after which there was nothing to do but permit the illness to run its course. It simply required time, he argued with himself, for enough of the quinine to get into the circulation to destroy the spores that were developing in the red corpuscles. In the meantime they would have to remain where they were.

"I am sorry to be delaying the game like this," said Ted faintly, as he watched the other members of the party busily engaged in the construction of a hut of

palm-leaves under which they could seek shelter in the event of rain.

"Never mind the delay. We have more time than anything else, and a few days will not make much difference," Stanley tried to reassure him.

"A single hour might make all the difference in the world. It may enable Tacama to beat us to the cave."

"I figure that Tacama will have troubles of his own along the way. We will leave here when you are well and strong again, and not one day sooner."

Stanley spent a part of each of the days that followed in hunting in the neighborhood of camp. Sometimes game was plentiful and he had no trouble in securing a supply of meat ample for their needs. On other days the forest seemed deserted.

Vicente devoted the greater part of his time to chopping down the palms with the plume-like leaves. This entailed a great amount of work, for the trunks were hard and tough, and it required three or four hours steady hacking before one of the tall trees crashed to the ground. But the bud of tender, folded shoots found in the tip of each palm was well worth all the labor. Moses prepared a salad of them that was relished by all, and when he boiled the snow-white buds they tasted like asparagus. Besides this the forest furnished nothing in the way of fruits or edible vegetation.

After a week of doubt and anxiety, Stanley thought he could detect a slight change in Ted's condition. However, the latter was very downcast, a natural result of the malaria, and blamed himself for the delay he had caused the expedition.

"What he needs," thought Stanley, "is something cheerful to occupy his mind or to amuse him, that would keep him from thinking too much over his

troubles. I must study up some plan that will do the trick."

"Vicente!" he called to the Ecuadorian, who was taking a siesta in his hammock. "Let's have another try with the gun. There isn't a speck of meat left in camp, so it's up to us to find some. Come along. No meat, no eat: sabe?"

Vicente replied with a broad grin, and shuffled away behind Stanley as he disappeared among the trees.

As they made their way over the leaf-strewn forest floor, Stanley's mind was busy trying to devise some means by which he could enliven Ted. The latter had made a game fight against his malady, but it is a well-known fact that malaria leaves its victims in a state of mental as well as physical depression.

The jungle seemed deserted. Although they were constantly on the alert for any sound or movement that would betray the presence of some bird or animal, they heard or saw nothing.

"Looks like a hopeless job to-day," said Stanley finally, leaning his rifle against the base of a thick ceiba.

"That is so always," Vicente observed. "Some days much game, other days nothing."

"We might as well start back in a minute or two. Perhaps we can pick up something on the way home."

Just then a flock of long-tailed, red-and-yellow macaws flew past above the tree tops with a rush of wings and loud, harsh cries. They circled once, twice, and then settled in the top of the big ceiba.

Stanley slowly reached for his rifle, after which both he and Vicente began to search the leafy branches overhead. The foliage was dense, it is true, but to Stanley it never occurred that such large, flamingly

colored birds as the macaws could possibly conceal themselves among the leaves. They circled the tree again and again, peering intently into the maze of branches, and moving slowly and cautiously so as not to frighten the macaws, but so completely had the flock disappeared that Stanley began to wonder whether or not they had really settled in that particular tree.

Suddenly the air was rent by a volley of piercing, raucous screams; the green vault above their heads became alive with darting forms as the great parrots dashed up into the open air above the forest and sped away.

"*Carramba!*" exclaimed Stanley in disgust. "The nerve of those things: to sit right there before my eyes, looking me over, no doubt, and laughing to themselves. And when they have seen enough, they give me the *ha-ha*, and make a quick getaway. I have to give them credit, though, for being pretty smart in hiding the way they did."

"All the wild animals know how to do that. Look straight up at the branches and the leaves; they are green or gray, but they look black against the sky. So do the birds sitting among them, no matter what their color, so long as they sit still; but as soon as they move they can be seen at once. In the forest it is wise to follow the example of the birds and the animals: stand still, and they cannot see you but you can see them; move, and they see you but you cannot see them," Vicente explained.

"Thanks for the advice. I am going to follow it the very next time."

As they neared camp, their attention was suddenly attracted by a commotion among the lofty branches of the trees a short distance ahead.

"Sh-h," came from Vicente, and Stanley stopped in his tracks. "Monkeys."

"I'd like to see them but I don't want to shoot a monkey," whispered Stanley.

The branches stopped swaying. Evidently the men had been seen from above, so they stood in their tracks and waited.

"Yes, yes, shoot one," whispered Vicente excitedly. "They are very good to eat and we have nothing else. Hold the rifle ready; I will call them."

He placed his hand to his mouth and gave a few soft whistles.

Kee-oo, kee-oo, kee-oo, the low, mournful note stole through the forest.

Almost immediately, Stanley saw a large black form appear on one of the thicker branches just in front of them. He took quick aim and fired. A heavy thud followed, announcing that the animal had been hit, and had fallen to the ground. At the same time a dozen other great black monkeys appeared, running in all directions in frantic endeavors to escape. The branches bent and rustled under their heavy weight; it sounded exactly like a strong wind blowing through the trees. Here and there one of the animals made a daring leap of twenty or thirty feet from one tree to another, the dark bodies hurtling through space as if shot from a catapult. In a minute they had all disappeared from view.

The hunters ran to the spot where the dead monkey lay on the ground. A feeling of pity and reproach came over Stanley as he looked at the lifeless creature stretched out on the dry leaves. Its face was turned up, and almost human in expression; the open, glassy eyes stared at him accusingly. But what troubled

him most was the fact that a small, baby monkey was clinging to the long black fur of its silent mother, whimpering plaintively.

"Oh, you poor little thing!" said Stanley in dismay. "I'm sorry—I did not know."

At sight of the big monsters that came so close to them, the little creature shrank closer to his mother, and looked into her face beseechingly. In some manner, he connected them with the awful tragedy that began with a crash like thunder; then followed the long fall, when the ground rose up at a fearful rate of speed, and smote them with a thud that knocked the breath out of his small body. Why didn't she move? Why didn't she take him bounding through the tree tops with the speed of the wind? He petted her face and began to cry and whimper. But alas! there was no response. The mother who had fought for him, picked the choicest berries for him, and who had played many a happy game of rough and tumble with him in the dizzy heights of their jungle home was now strangely silent, and for the first time failed to respond to his entreaties. Before, but a single call had never failed to bring her barking to his side, ready to console and soothe, or to fight if need be.

An overwhelming sense of calamity came over him, and with it the realization that he was alone in the world. He must now fight for himself. Although panic-stricken and frightened, he turned to face his persecutors with the loudest snarl that could be forced out of his weak little body. Most of the jungle fighting consisted of a game of bluff; whoever could roar or snarl the loudest usually succeeded in frightening away his enemy; he had learned that much, and would put his knowledge to the test. Then, not knowing what else to do, he sat still and waited.

"I'm certainly sorry," Stanley repeated. "I cannot give you back what I have taken away, but I'll try hard to make up for it in some other way."

He went up to the little animal and, before Vicente could stop him, had extended a friendly hand toward it. With a scream it leaped at the outstretched fingers, and sank its teeth into them their full length.

"Oh, so that's your system, is it?" exclaimed Stanley, drawing back in haste. "Well, I don't blame you. I am glad, though, that your teeth are not a foot long."

The bite Stanley had received amounted to little more than a scratch.

"Throw your coat over him," advised Vicente. "He will bite for a day or two, but after that he will be as tame as a kitten. He will be a fine pet, too. Woolly monkeys are the best of all kinds to keep around the house."

Stanley did as he was told, and while the little monkey struggled and squealed, he was helpless within the strong khaki covering. Vicente picked up the dead monkey and they returned to camp.

"I have a present for you," Stanley greeted Ted from a distance. "Name it and you can have it."

"I haven't pep enough to even think," Ted replied wearily. "What is it?"

"A nice little monk. Moses, bring a few yards of the heaviest fish-line, and we'll tie him up so you can see him."

"A real wild monkey?" asked Ted with some show of interest.

"Of course. Where could I get any other kind?"

When Moses came with the string, they cautiously unwrapped the little prisoner and tied him firmly around the waist.

"Tell me how you caught him," said Ted. "I have never seen such a beautiful monkey."

Stanley told of the unsuccessful hunt and of his finally being compelled to shoot a monkey for food, as a last resort, and of his discovery of the young animal clinging to the dead mother.

"Po' lil soul," Moses exclaimed, extending a sympathetic hand. "Ow, but yo' suttently kin take care of yo'self even if yo' is a orphint."

The small captive sat huddled up in a heap, his head drooping between his arms. The long blue-black fur, like deep plush, was dishevelled, and the face wore an expression of woe and fear. He was of unusually stocky build, with a plump body and strong arms and legs, and about half the size of a house-cat. The tail was long and could be used for holding tight or grasping things. The head was round, with a flat, intelligent face and bright eyes. Although the little monkey looked sad and lonely, he strongly resented all their friendly advances.

"I is going to call yo' Snowball," said Moses, exhibiting a sense of humor. "Because yo' shore is black."

"You don't mean to say you are going to eat that, do you?" said Ted, as Vicente began to skin the large monkey.

"Why not? Wild monkeys are clean animals and eat fruits and buds, mostly. That is a lot better than pigs, and we eat pork."

"Ugh! You go ahead if you want to, but none for me. I should feel like a cannibal."

When the carcass had been skinned and washed, Vicente impaled it on a stick and placed it over the fire to roast, turning it from time to time so that it

would cook evenly on all sides. An appetizing odor filled the air as the meat sizzled and browned on the spit.

Ted watched the proceedings with interest.

"If it tastes as good as it smells, I might be tempted to try a little piece," he ventured.

"I don't like the idea of eating monkeys, either," said Stanley. "But we have no other meat. Besides, we may have worse things than that before long, so we might as well start in and get used to them."

When the animal was thoroughly done, Vicente cut off a few slices and offered them to the Americans. They tasted the meat gingerly, at first. To their surprise they found it delicious—not unlike roast lamb, but much tastier.

"This is really splendid," said Ted. "I haven't enjoyed a meal so much in a long time."

"Same here," agreed Stanley. "But just the same, I am not going to shoot another monkey if there is any other kind of game to be had. I can't quite forget how Snowball looked and acted, and I don't want to see that again."

Ted was still too ill to continue the journey, so it was necessary to spend the greater part of a second week in camp. During the seemingly endless hours of the long, hot days he was frequently left alone the greater part of the time while the other members of the party were scouring the forest for food. During these periods of loneliness he tried to make friends with Snowball, who was always tied to a corner post of the shelter.

The first three days, the little monkey completely ignored all of Ted's efforts, and sat quietly in the same spot. On the morning of the fourth day he looked

up occasionally, only long enough to get a brief glimpse of the big man-creature that talked so soothingly to him; but Ted felt encouraged and redoubled his efforts.

"You're a nice little fellow," he said in a sympathetic voice, at the same time extending his hand over the side of the hammock. "Come on, let's be friends."

Snowball looked up shyly, and advanced a few steps.

"Come on," Ted encouraged. "I wouldn't hurt you for anything. I don't blame you for being scared, after what you've gone through, but you need not be afraid of me."

The monkey came nearer and nearer, a few inches at a time, until he had reached the end of his string, then he resumed his disconsolate position.

Ted gave up his efforts and sank into a light slumber. He was awakened suddenly by something brushing across his face, and opening his eyes he found that Snowball had climbed into the hammock.

In some manner, the captive had succeeded in untying the string that bound him. Now he was patting Ted's face with his little black hands, now hugging him close with his arms around the astonished man's neck.

Ted reached up slowly and gently smoothed the silky fur.

"Poor little monkey," he said softly. "We are both out of luck, but better days are coming." At sound of the voice the monkey began to sniff and sob.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear," Ted sympathized. "Your little heart is broken, but that will never do. Come on, cheer up; don't flunk like that. Be a sport." Then more brusquely; "I'll stick by you and you stay with me. We'll be regular pals. I learned a long time ago

that anything that is little and helpless and friendly deserves protection, and I'll certainly look after you."

The monkey stopped crying instantly, and with his arms tight around Ted's neck fell fast asleep. Stanley found them in this position when he returned from his hunt in the forest.

"You seem to be getting along famously together," he remarked, trying to hide his surprise and satisfaction. "Let me have the monk; I'll tie him up again."

Snowball awoke with a start. He looked around in alarm until his eyes met Ted's, when the expression immediately changed to one of confidence and contentment as he peered intently into the face of his new-found friend.

"Not a chance," said Ted hastily. "Snowball and I are pals from now on. He is never going to be tied up again. I will look after him, and if he ever feels like going back to his relatives in the tree tops there shall be nothing to stop him. But I'll bet he will never want to desert me, will you, old scout?"

The monkey gave a little *cheep* of satisfaction and clung tighter.

"What did I tell you?" asked Ted proudly.

Inwardly, Stanley was greatly pleased with this new development. It had come faster than he had hoped. "That is the best medicine for him," he thought. "By to-morrow Snowball will be still friendlier, and will keep him so busy that he'll forget all about his sickness."

This prediction proved correct, and three days later they were able to roll their packs and continue the march through the jungle. Moses insisted on carrying Ted's pack the greater part of the time, nor did he seem to suffer from the extra weight.

As the days went by, they became more and more impressed with the great, breathless silence of the forest. The giant trees, rearing their gnarled and twisted branches heavenward, stood like mute sentinels guarding the secrets of the jungle.

Animal life was far from abundant, but it was always possible to pick up enough game to supply the little party with meat.

Early one morning, they were startled by a terrific din in the tree tops. There came a few gruff barks, followed immediately by a loud, rumbling roar. At first there was but one voice; then others joined in a frightful chorus until the forest was filled with a sound like thunder, rising and falling in hoarse, long-drawn cadence compared to which the roaring of a lion seemed mild and feeble.

"*Churucos*," said Vicente simply.

"What are *churucos*?" asked Ted excitedly.

"Big red monkeys."

"Oh, yes, red howlers. I never thought they could make such a racket. Let's go over and have a look at them. I've read that they are among the largest of all South American monkeys; they are also among the most savage, and never live long in captivity."

They ran to the place from which the noise came; directly overhead were the great creatures responsible for it. Back and forth they charged, over the thick lower branches, as if in a rage, emitting the deep, guttural roars and barks all the while. They appeared the size of a collie dog, but the fur was of a deep chestnut-red color. The massive heads were covered with a shaggy mane that hung in a beard beneath the chin.

Their appearance was fully as terrifying as their actions, but the men soon discovered that the animals

did not mean to attack. They merely charged toward them, but always stopped short when they reached the ends of the branches and retraced their steps. Stanley estimated that there must be at least a dozen in the troop. After giving vent to their feelings a short time, the entire band suddenly hushed its clamor, and slowly made off through the trees.

Upon resuming their march an hour later, the party entered a region where the ridge of foot-hills ran close along the base of the main range of mountains. The slopes of the latter grew constantly more abrupt until there rose on their left but a stupendous wall of rock that towered hundreds of feet above their heads and lost itself in a dense, yellow haze. The hills closed upon them on their right. As they made their way through the narrow, gloomy ravine a faint, pungent odor struck their nostrils; the vegetation seemed sparse and stunted compared to that in the country they had just left.

"What do you make of this?" asked Ted, as the party stopped for a brief breathing spell.

"Smells like sulphur," Stanley answered. "Maybe there is a volcano in the neighborhood."

"That would explain the presence of the yellow vapor up above. This is certainly a weird place."

"Yes, and the sooner we get out of it the better. There hasn't been an eruption here in a long time, if ever; you can tell that because there are no ashes or lava around. But just the same, this place is enough to get on a person's nerves."

An hour later they reached a point where the tall cliffs swung away from the hills in a great half circle. To their astonishment they saw an open, horseshoe-shaped plain ahead, flanked by the wall of rocks on

three of its curving sides and by the low, forested ridge on the other. Dotting the short green grass that carpeted the level space were numerous deer, giving the plot a park-like appearance.

The mountains, far as they could see, rose in the same precipitous escarpment of solid granite, but nowhere was the summit of the range visible. The mighty formation lost itself in a uniform mass of sickly yellow vapor that hung from the heavens like an obscuring veil.

At sight of the deer Moses became greatly excited and begged Stanley to shoot one, and Vicente vigorously seconded his entreaties.

"I don't want to kill such a large animal," Stanley responded, "because we can't possibly eat all of the meat before it spoils. Let's see if there isn't something smaller around."

"They is not too large, suh," Moses persisted. "And I kin roas' the meat so it will keep a week. I will carry along what they is left over."

"Why not shoot one," Ted encouraged, "and give everybody a good feed? We haven't a thing for tonight, and venison will be a welcome change from the everlasting parrots and toucans."

"All right! here goes."

At the crack of the rifle one of the deer leaped high into the air, then dropped in a crumpled heap. The others looked up an instant with startled eyes, and bounded away into the forest.

When the men ran to pick up the stricken animal they found it to be of medium size, with single spike horns. They stopped long enough to skin the carcass, after which they placed a quarter of it on top of each pack and continued the march.

They had no difficulty in crossing a small stream that they encountered flowing leisurely through the open space. It was shallow and easily fordable.

Late that afternoon they entered a stretch of forest that was incumbered with dense masses of undergrowth, especially of a species of tall, slender cane the tough stems of which formed a thicket that was hard to penetrate. It was necessary to make vigorous use of the machetes before they could enter far into the stubborn growth.

"I cannot understand this sudden change," said Stanley, "unless it means that we are nearing a water-course."

Shortly after they emerged on the bank of a wide, sluggish river. Sheer walls of trees bordered both sides of the stream, the trunks united into a solid battlement by mosses, lilies, and creepers from which hung clusters of scarlet trumpet-flowers. Growing at the very edge of the water was an occasional clump of graceful *ita* palms, the spine-covered stems leaning far out over the yellow flood, then rising in a series of stately, feather-crowned columns. The air was heavy with the perfume of vanilla-beans that drooped in little bunches of purplish, leathery pods from slender orchid vines threading their way through the maze of plants.

Just below them the muddy, flowing road of water entered a wide gorge that had been cut through the foot-hills, but there was neither roar nor mist to indicate the presence of falls or rapids. The broad, silent river simply disappeared from view into the cleft, smoothly and unruffled, like a stream of molten glass.

Parrots and macaws flew screaming overhead; but,

although there were often a score or more in a single flock, the birds always flew two by two. Long-billed toucans with black heads and red-and-yellow barred breasts, clattered and yelped in the tree tops. Troops of monkeys looked down upon the travellers in silent curiosity or vanished among the leaf-covered branches.

Gorgeous butterflies twinkled in the sunlight; one species was of the changing colors of mother-of-pearl; another was black with huge spots of peacock-blue on the wings; and all of them were the size of a man's hand. They used the wide swath cut through the jungle by the river as a parade-ground, and flew up and down the opening with flashing, glittering wings.

The water in the river was low. That fact was apparent from the number of bare, sandy islands dotting the watercourse. Long lines of crocodiles lay sunning themselves on the hot, dry sand. The great reptiles were sprawled out, with wide-open mouths, showing the orange-red tongue and rows of white, spike-shaped teeth.

Ted and Stanley, although rapidly becoming accustomed to the jungle, and ready for almost any surprise, were overawed by the wonder of the spectacle. Here at last was the real tropical wilderness with its abundant and varied wild life; it was terrible in its very magnitude and grandeur.

"This must be the river that Yupanqui, the old chief, said we should find," said Ted in a hushed voice.

"Yes, at last. It is our first 'landmark.' Now we know that we are on the right road," Stanley replied. "We must look at the map to see if we can get our bearings."

He took the small folding map out of his pocket

and traced their course east from Cuzco, then along the base of the Andes northward.

"The river is marked on the map in dotted lines," he said, "meaning that it has not been explored, but it flows into the Madre de Dios, whose waters find their way into the Amazon. How enormous the Amazon country is! According to this map it is about three thousand miles from here to the Atlantic in a straight line. How——"

"I wish we had time to spend a month here," Ted interrupted. "There are so many things to see."

"We shall probably have to stay here a few days anyhow. We have to find some way of getting across the river."

They cleared a space in the cane thicket and, rigging up tripods of the stoutest poles, slung the hammocks for the night.

Moses immediately began to roast the quarters of venison while Vicente accompanied the two Americans on a short walk along the river bank. Everywhere the dense vegetation and abundance of animal life were the same; they were bewildering in their profusion.

When darkness had settled over the wilderness, shutting from view the jungle and its wild inhabitants, they sat around the glowing embers and in low tones discussed the wonders of their new surroundings.

"Look, look!" exclaimed Vicente suddenly, pointing to the opposite side of the river.

Above the dark mass of forest, a ruddy glow was faintly lighting up the pitch-black sky. As they watched, it grew steadily brighter until the very heavens seemed aflame. Then a chorus of voices rose in a low, monotonous chant.

"Indians," said Vicente excitedly, while Moses stared in dumb silence at the fiery glow.

"Put out the fire, quick," Stanley ordered, and they scattered the brands and stamped them into the ground until not a spark was visible.

"I am glad we saw them before they saw us. We can have no more camp-fires after dark. They would give away our presence, and being discovered is the last thing we want."

"They must be the Macacos," said Ted, looking in the direction from which the voices came. "Everything is working out according to schedule, all right, but I didn't expect we should find them until we got further into their country."

"It means that we must use the greatest caution in the future. No more shooting, unless in self-defense. When we get across the river we shall have to do all our travelling by night."

"Lucky we shot the deer. That will keep us for a few days. By that time——"

His speech was interrupted by the deep roll of a drum.

Boom-bum, boom-bum, boom-bum, the dismal sound rang through the night-enshrouded forest.

"Mah goodness!" said Moses with a shudder. "I doan know if I want to go no fudder or not."

"What?" Stanley turned upon him. "Do you mean to say that you are afraid?"

"No, oh, no, suh. But I was jest thinkin' that Barbados is a long ways off."

"One more word like that and back you go, alone. Understand?"

Further conversation was checked by the din that now came from the direction of the huge blaze, slen-

der tongues of which were leaping above the tree tops.

Loud wails and high-pitched shrieks rose high above the booming drums and chanting chorus until the jungle was filled with the hideous clamor. This continued throughout the night and well into the following morning.

What were the monkey-men about? That was the question that filled the minds of Ted and Stanley through the long hours of that sleepless night. Were they engaged in the celebration of some cannibal rite in honor of their tree-god? In fancy they could picture the ghastly assembly of crazed savages howling and dancing in the yellow glare of the great fire, with the black jungle forming a fitting background for the wild orgy. Or were they rejoicing over the prospects of securing victims for a feast yet to come, of whose whereabouts scouts had brought them tidings?

It was fortunate for the little party crouching under the matted canes that they did not know the startling nature of the events that were to crowd the days to follow.

CHAPTER XII

VICENTE'S TREACHERY

"THE sooner we get away from this particular spot the better for us," said Stanley, on the morning following the great bonfire and the weird tumult in the forest. "Apparently the other side of the river is teeming with Indians."

"Then you don't intend to try to cross here?" asked Ted.

"No. That would be running right into the hands of the monkey-men. We must avoid them as long as possible. I have an idea that once we are discovered it will mean fighting every step of our way." Then, as Stanley hesitated, Ted said: "I am waiting to hear your plan."

"My mind is made up as to what we *might* do, but I should like to hear from you first. Which way do you think we ought to go?"

"Up-stream. Then we would be getting back toward the mountains."

"If we go up-stream," said Stanley, "we will be getting nearer the mountains, as you say, and the chances are that the river will grow steadily narrower and be easier to cross; that is one view of the situation. Now, on the other hand, if we go down-stream, it means crossing the foot-hills so we shall have them as a barrier between ourselves and the Indians—unless they live on both sides of the ridge. Also, in staying along the base of the hills we shall be following the old chief's advice."

"Then you are in favor of going down-stream and

crossing as soon as possible after we reach the other side of the ridge?"

"Yes. No doubt the line of hills again joins the main range at no great distance from here, so it will really be a short cut."

Ted agreed that this would be the better course to pursue, so they retraced their steps until the open forest beyond the belt of cane had been reached; after that they followed along the ragged border of the matted jungle growing on the river bank, going in an easterly direction.

The ridge of hills was not over four hundred feet high and they had no difficulty in crossing it; once on the other side, a trail was cut to the river.

After emerging from the gorge the yellow stream spread out over a wide bed, the greater part of which was visible owing to the low stage of the water. There were numerous sandy islands, some of considerable extent; the surface of each was rent with deep fissures and cracks as the result of having been exposed to the parching rays of the tropical sun. Around them, the water flowed through a network of deep channels.

"Crossing here would be easy if it were not for the packs," said Ted, as they slid down the high bank and surveyed the broad, desolate expanse of sand and water that lay before them. "We could swim from one island to the other; but how are we going to get the things across without soaking and spoiling them?"

"Put 'em on a board and shove 'em on ahead," suggested Moses.

"All right; run along and get the board." Then, as Moses looked puzzled: "Your plan is pretty good, anyway; we can make a little raft of sticks and use that instead."

"Drat these beasts!" came from Stanley in exasperated tones. "I thought at first they were mosquitoes, but they look like gnats."

"I thought they was hornets," said Moses. "How they kin bite!"

By this time Ted too had become aware of the presence of the troublesome insects. They appeared in swarms and hovered about the hands and faces of the men like quivering flecks of dust. When one settled it immediately bored through the skin, causing an itching sensation as it rapidly gorged itself on the blood of its victim.

The minute insects had black-and-yellow striped bodies and were shaped like a house-fly, but were so small that it was difficult to see them; however, each bite left a little red blister that itched and burned many hours after. Vicente called them *poloriños*, or sand-flies, and said they were common along all the tropical rivers.

"Let's hurry and get away from the river, then," said Ted. "These pests are enough to worry a person to death."

The insects had become so numerous that the men were kept busy slapping at their hands and faces in vain endeavors to rid themselves of them.

"Sounds like a storm coming up," said Stanley suddenly, between attacks on the sand-flies.

They listened intently for a few minutes. A faint sound could be heard, like the rush of wind through the tree tops in the distance.

"That's strange," Ted exclaimed finally. "Not a cloud in the sky, but that storm is certainly coming our way and pretty fast, too."

With each passing minute the sound increased in volume until it grew into a loud, steady roar.

"It's the river, the river," cried Vicente in alarm, clambering up the steep bank. The others followed his lead, and stood waiting expectantly.

Shortly after, a wall of yellow water crested with grayish foam dashed out of the gorge with a roar that was deafening, and swept down the river bed. The cracked and sun-baked islands that had protruded above the winding channels of the river were engulfed and covered by the first onrush of the raging torrent and, as the imprisoned air rose out of the myriads of fissures and crevices, the muddy flood hissed and bubbled like an enormous, boiling caldron.

The two Americans gazed in wonder at the awful phenomenon unfolded before their eyes, but Vicente hastened to assure them that this was a common occurrence in the headwaters of rivers that had their sources in the mountain country. A heavy rainfall on the steep slopes caused the water to dash down in a deluge that overwhelmed everything in its path. But such a rapid rise never lasted long; it would subside almost as rapidly as it had come.

Two hours later the river had begun to fall. The men had busied themselves in the meantime cutting down a number of the stalks of a tall, feathery bamboo that grew in scattered clumps along the bank. Each stem was upward of twenty feet high and from four to six inches thick, and consisted of a number of sections or joints that were filled with water. Giant fishing-poles they were in reality, growing in their native jungle. By cutting a slight gash in each joint the water was permitted to drain out, after which the opening was sealed with gum collected from the copaiba-trees by Vicente; this left them very light and buoyant.

This work was tiresome and required a good deal of time. When four of the stalks had been prepared

and cut into six-foot lengths, they stopped for a short rest. It was fortunate for the little party that this was so, for had they continued their hacking at the tough wood their presence would have been discovered by the very people they were so anxious to avoid.

Snowball, who never strayed far from Ted's feet, was the first to give the alarm. Before this time they had learned that the little monkey possessed unusually keen eyesight. Frequently, on the trail, he had attracted their attention to some bird or animal by peering intently at the partially concealed creature long before they could see it; now, however, his antics were different.

After gazing fixedly at the dark line of forest on the far side of the river, he suddenly gave a frightened chirp and ran up into Ted's arms, where he clung, looking up into his face with piteous appeal.

"Don't be afraid," said Ted soothingly. "I won't let it hurt you, whatever it is." Then, to the others: "That little fellow saw something pretty exciting over there. He never acted like that before. Lay low and keep still, but above all, keep out of sight."

No one stirred. All eyes were turned upon the spot in the distant forest that had been indicated by the monkey. They had not long to wait.

The shadowy form of an Indian emerged stealthily from the dark wall of jungle, and after a furtive glance up and down the river, sprang from the edge of the steep bank into the shallow water; another followed close behind, and then others until there were seven.

The watchers, concealed among the tangled vegetation, caught their breath in apprehension. What did the savages intend to do? Had they seen the four strangers who had dared to venture into the frontier

of their undisputed domain, and were they coming across the river to attack?

What repulsive-looking creatures they were, more like monkeys than human beings. They had drawn together now, apparently in consultation before charging across the waterway that separated them from their victims. Ted and Stanley looked carefully to their rifles and held them in readiness.

The Indians were of a uniform height and appeared to be of short stature—well under five feet, in fact; while dwarfs, they were nevertheless well built, with long, muscular arms and broad shoulders. Their color was a light shade of brown, and they were devoid of clothing excepting only a wide girdle of red fur that the four at once recognized as having been taken from howling monkeys. Necklaces of glistening white teeth adorned the short, thick necks, and each one wore a stick tufted with bright-colored feathers through the upper lip and nose so that they formed a cross. The long black hair was drawn back tightly to the centre of the head and bound, the ends, ornamented with feathers, sticking up like a small feather duster.

Presently the savages set up a loud howling that was an excellent imitation of the monkey chorus the little party had heard some days before. This was evidently a signal to their tribesmen, for more of the fearsome savages appeared out of the jungle. Each carried a slender rod six or seven feet long in his hands.

The assembly now spread out in a thin line along the edge of the water, and slowly advanced.

"Shoot," whispered Moses. "Doan leave 'em come across. They——"

"Hush," said Stanley. "We'll wait to see what they do first."

The river was still flowing rapidly but the islands that had been covered by the deluge now began to reappear one by one. The rush of water had washed numerous little hollows in their sandy surface, and as the flood receded it left them filled with shallow ponds. It was these places that the Indians were seeking out. Suddenly one of them raised one end of his slender cane to his mouth and pointed the other at the nearest pond, but a few feet in front of him; there followed a violent splashing in the water and the savage rushed forward, stooped down, and after fumbling about a moment pulled out a good-sized fish with his hands.

"Oh!" said Ted. "They are shooting fish with blow-guns; but what a terrible-looking lot they are!"

"I can understand why they call them monkey-men. They look like monkeys, wear the skins of monkeys, and howl like monkeys," said Stanley. "Here's hoping we never have a mix-up with them."

"How about trying to cross the river here now?"

"This place is as good as any other, but it will have to be done at night. No more day work after this. They seem to live on both sides of the ridge, so nothing is to be gained by looking for another crossing."

The Indians were now shooting fish all along the line. They carried a reserve supply of arrows the size of slender lead-pencils in the tufts of their hair, and when one of the thin shafts missed its mark and was lost they drew another one from the storage-place. They simply placed the arrow in one end of the hollow cane, after which they blew into it; *puff*, and the missile sped out of the other end of the tube. When each of the Indians had collected two or three fish, the entire party scrambled up the high bank and disappeared in the forest.

Vicente had watched the Indians with a show of great interest, but had said nothing during the entire proceedings. At times he seemed strangely agitated.

"What's the trouble?" Stanley demanded, noting his restlessness.

"Nothing, señor," Vicente hastened to reply. "When do we cross the river?"

"To-night."

"Yo' ain't afraid, is yo'?" asked Moses with a smile.

"Afraid? No, not of anything—or any one either," in a sullen tone.

They began tying the sections of bamboo together with long strips of fibre cut from the *chique-chique* palms.

"Vicente is getting worse every day," said Stanley to Ted when they were alone, the others having gone away a short distance for more fibre.

"Sounded like he was trying to pick a fight with Moses. I pity him though if that negro ever gets hold of him; he could break him in two."

"He could in a fair fight; but Vicente is treacherous. I have been keeping an eye on him lately; he has been restless and surly and liable to break out any minute."

"Probably the only reason he is respectful to us is because he is afraid we will send him back if he is not. I can hardly blame him for not wanting to make the trip back to Cuzco alone; but we must continue to watch him, and if he ever shows the least sign of disobedience to us we have to nip it in the bud."

When the little raft was finished they sat down to a supper of cold venison. The meat, as prepared by Moses, was keeping in good condition and tasted delicious. Also, there was an ample supply for two or three days to come, so it would be unnecessary to

shoot game during that length of time. Moses had explained to them that the way to prevent meat from spoiling in a hot climate was to keep it in *large pieces* after it had been thoroughly roasted, and to slice off only the amount needed for each meal. They found that this method worked perfectly.

When darkness had settled over the jungle they carried the raft down to the river and piled their packs and clothing on it.

The first channel was so shallow that it could be forded. Gaining the edge of the nearest island, they dragged the raft and its load across in the manner of a sledge. The next channel was deep and they had to swim a distance of ten or twelve yards in order to reach the second island. In crossing this they noticed numbers of silvery, shimmering fish scattered over the moist sand. Moses stooped to pick one up, then gave a howl of pain as he hurriedly withdrew his hand.

"Ow!" he yelled, "he bit me; he bit my finger off."

"Not so loud, or you will have something worse than a fish after you. Let's have a look."

The bright starlight revealed the fact that a good-sized piece of flesh was missing from the index finger of the negro's right hand. It was bleeding badly. Moses tore a strip from his shirt and carefully bound up the mutilated member.

"Do you know the name of that fish, Vicente?" asked Stanley.

"Yes, it is a carribe."

He struck one of the glistening forms a sharp blow across the head with his machete and then picked it up. It was somewhat like a bass in appearance and about a foot long.

"See," said Vicente, prying open the rather small

mouth. Each jaw was set with a row of flat, triangular teeth with sharp edges. "Carribes are common in rivers like this," Vicente explained. "Always there are many, often thousands together, and they kill everything from a man on down. Once a creature is attacked, it is lost, for the fish act like they are crazy when they taste blood, and keep dashing at their victim, biting out a piece each time until in a few minutes only the skeleton remains."

"Then why didn't they attack us while we were in the water a few minutes ago?"

"The carribes are very strange in their behavior. Sometimes they come in a multitude as soon as there is a struggling in the water; other times they pay no attention to it. One can never tell."

"Well, here we are, half-way across now. We got here this far without trouble, and we shall have to take a chance on the rest of the distance. Are the carribes good to eat?"

"Yes, señor, if they are boiled, as they have many bones."

"Gather up a few more then and put them on the raft. We can cook them to-morrow."

Vicente obeyed, being careful to kill each fish with the machete before picking it up. They had been but recently stranded by the falling water, and showed that they were still alive and full of fight by flopping about on the sand.

They continued the alternate swimming and walking, and reached the far bank of the river without further incident.

"Thank goodness this is over!" said Ted as they began to unload the raft. "I had been thinking about the crocodiles all the way, and then, the carribes worried

me a little too. Seems like the ferocity of most of the animals is rated too high."

"No doubt they do cause trouble at times," said Stanley. "And if we lived in the jungle several years we might have some disagreeable adventures with them. Naturally, one such happening is enough for anybody, and the natives never forget it, so they are cautious in the future."

When the things had been taken off the raft they pushed it out into the middle of the channel and set it adrift. They did not want the Indians to find it in the neighborhood in the event that they returned to the river.

In spite of the lack of heavy undergrowth, walking through the forest by night was a difficult undertaking. The light of the rising moon, filtering through the leafy vault above, aided them in picking their way back up-stream toward the foot-hills. When they reached the low ridge they came upon a wide path that led from the river and followed close along the base of the forested mounds. Vicente said this was a game trail that had been worn by the feet of countless animals on their way to and from their favorite drinking-place. They thanked Providence for the lucky find, as it enabled them to travel silently and at a rapid pace.

The jungle seemed peopled with invisible forms. High overhead, the wind rushing through the tree tops caused the swaying branches to creak and groan, while those that overlapped grated against their neighbors with a screeching or moaning sound.

"*Oh-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho*," came a weird, penetrating cry from directly above them that was enough to make the flesh creep, and froze them in their tracks.

"My heaven!" whispered Moses, in terror, "I doan

like that soun' a-tall. It too much like the lamentation of a sufferin' soul."

As no one had an explanation to offer, they waited silently, at the same time gazing up at the lacework of leaves and branches outlined against the moonlit sky. After a few minutes the piercing cry was repeated; then a great bird suddenly spread its wings and soared away above the trees.

"Must have been an owl of some kind," Ted suggested. "But it certainly had me guessing."

"What did you think it was?" asked Stanley.

"I hadn't the slightest idea, did you?"

"No, not until I saw it fly. The bird's wings were too long and narrow for an owl's; it must be one of the giant nightjars one reads so much about. Imagine a whippoorwill or a night-hawk as large as a crow, and you have a fair picture of the bird we just heard. They are said to be very rare, so we are lucky to have run across this one. One seldom sees them in the daytime, because they sit all hunched up on the end of a dead branch or stub so that it is almost impossible to distinguish them from their perch."

Rafts of clouds floating across the face of the moon now frequently obscured the silvery radiance for short intervals of time. They grew denser and came more frequently as the hours went by, but the men kept doggedly to the trail without slackening their efforts.

Perhaps it was intuition that caused Stanley, who was in the lead, to stop suddenly with tensed ears, and eyes that strove in vain to penetrate the darkness. The jungle had been plunged into absolute blackness by an unusually thick mass of clouds that completely blotted out every vestige of moonlight.

The others, who were following close behind, needed no warning. They, too, sensed the danger and came to an abrupt standstill. No one spoke, but as the seconds dragged by a nameless dread came over them. What was the lurking terror of the jungle that made its presence felt even in the impenetrable darkness of night?

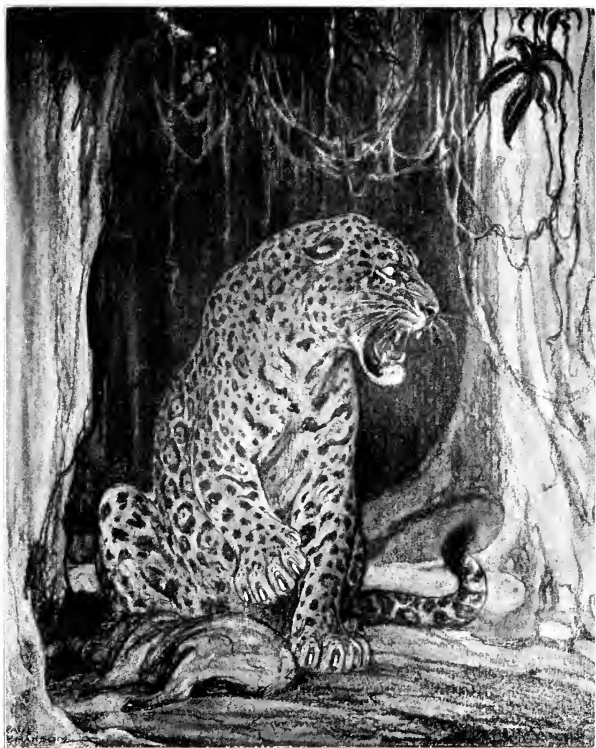
The banks of vapor scurrying across the heavens melted into the distance. Gradually the mellow moonbeams stole through the interlocking branches. Then they understood.

In the centre of the trail and not more than half a dozen yards away loomed the shadowy form of a great beast with eyes that glowed like coals of greenish fire. As the light grew stronger, the dark hulk resolved itself into a huge jaguar crouching over its kill of some smaller animal that had been slain in the runway. Apparently the creature objected to being disturbed at its midnight feast, for its tail was lashing rapidly from side to side and low, guttural growls were emanating from its throat.

They stood fascinated by the formidable brute. One spring, two perhaps, and it would be upon them. With a snarl of rage, it sat bolt upright like the huge cat it was, baring its long white fangs and drawing back its massive front paws in an attitude of defense. The black spots on its tawny hide now showed plainly in the bright moonlight.

Stanley held his rifle in readiness for instant use in case the creature charged; but firing it was the last thing he wanted to do, because the report would undoubtedly make known their presence to the Indians, who could not be far away.

"Back up," he whispered to the men behind him,



With a snarl of rage, it sat bolt upright like the huge cat it was

without taking his eyes off the crouching beast. "Slowly, don't make a sudden move."

They obeyed mechanically. Foot by foot they retreated from the menacing jaguar until, rounding a bend in the trail, they lost it from view.

"That was a narrow escape," said Ted, heaving a sigh of relief. "I thought we were in for trouble that time sure."

"So did I. Even if we could have killed the creature, which is doubtful, the shots would have aroused the monkey-men, and they are far more dangerous."

"Let's get away from here as fast as possible. I don't trust that beast. It might change its mind and come after us any minute."

"Possibly, but I think not. It had just killed a deer or wild pig, and was unwilling to give up its meal to an intruder. Seemed to me that it was trying to frighten us away so that it could go on undisturbed with its dinner."

"Well, how peacefully it must be eating right now then."

"Yes, suh! let it eat in peace," said Moses earnestly. "I wouldn't take none of its food away from it if I was starvin' to death."

"Coward," taunted Vicente. "You were the last one in the party, but you would have run if the *tigre* had taken one step toward us."

"Yes," returned Moses calmly. "An' I expect I would of bin run over by you trying to git past me."

They made a wide détour around the spot and again struck the game trail some distance above. In fancy, they could see the tapirs, deer, and peccaries wending their way over the hard-beaten earth during the hours of dawn and dusk; at night, the great-padded jaguars

stole stealthily along it and pounced on the creatures that had unwarily neglected to reach their hiding-places in the dense thickets before the coming of darkness.

"Now let's keep our eyes open for a good spot in which to spend the day," suggested Ted. "Daylight will be here in an hour and we ought to be hidden by that time."

Shortly after, they discovered a small ravine that offered an ideal spot for concealment. They cleared a space in the centre of the bushes and tall ferns with which the ravine was filled, and after a hasty meal of venison, palm-buds, and biscuit, rigged up their hammocks for a much-needed rest.

Ted was awakened late in the afternoon by Moses, who seemed greatly excited.

"Vicente has went an' left us," the negro announced angrily.

"What?" exclaimed Ted in amazement. "You don't mean to say he has started back alone?"

"I doan know where he has went but he shore is gone, an' has took some things as doan belong to him. My tooth-brush is among the missing."

"Why all the excitement?" asked Stanley, thrusting his head out from under his mosquito-net. Moses repeated the information he had just given Ted.

Together, they made a hurried survey of their belongings. It was as the negro had stated. Vicente had taken a number of things, including most of the tinned provisions they had saved so carefully; but the thing that was particularly appalling was the fact that one of the rifles and a quantity of ammunition also were missing.

"So Vicente has shown his true color at last," said

Stanley hotly. "I could forgive almost anything, but not that. It's bad enough for him to desert at a time like this, but when he steals our food and rifle besides, well——"

"I never did like that man nohow," Moses declared, still angry over the loss of his tooth-brush. "He say he know where they's gold a-plenty an' he ask me to go along git it an' carry his pack on the way."

"When did he say that?" asked Stanley quietly, for a great light was beginning to dawn upon him.

"A long time ago an' he bin makin' fun of me ever since because I say no."

"Moses," said Stanley in the same even tones. "Do you remember when we crossed over to the coast from the island where we found you; we were lost in the desert and were dying of thirst. One night we saw a light in the distance and dropping our packs we ran toward it because we knew it meant water, and the saving of our lives. Do you remember?"

"I shore do. I never bin so thusty befo' in my life."

"When we had all drunk our fill, I told all of you to go back for the packs while Mister Ted and I went up to the hut. Did *everybody* go back?"

"Yes, suh! all but Vicente; he say he sick an' fo' me to fetch his bundle. He foller yo' to the house."

Stanley bit his lip upon receiving this startling information.

"It's as plain as the very daylight, now," he said. "Vicente stole the ring; he put the feathers in the ground and lied about seeing a man run away, to make us keep on suspecting Tacama. Vicente, the thief and traitor combined. It doesn't seem possible."

"No. It does not seem possible that one man could

be so dishonorable. At last we know the truth. It wasn't Tacama who listened at the window, but Vicente. Tacama only tried to get away from us because he was afraid we would tell what we had seen him try to do."

"Yes, and now that we are sure who has it, it will be all the easier to get it back. I am determined that Vicente shall never reach the cave even if keeping him from it means our own failure."

"Shake," said Ted simply. "Let's hit the trail."

CHAPTER XIII

THE HOLY TREE

ALL night long they followed the winding game trail that skirted the base of the low ridge, without finding a trace of Vicente. It was a melancholy little party that trudged on hour after hour, filled with the grim determination to overtake the thief.

They spoke little, and then the conversation invariably turned to Vicente and his treachery. Moses, who knew nothing of the ring, blamed the Ecuadorian merely for the theft of his tooth-brush, and the rifle and food he had taken.

"I all the time suspect that man no good," he commented. "He like a snake in the grass, sneakin' aroun', watchin' an' listenin', an' ready to strike when yo' ain't lookin'."

"It's too late for that now," said Stanley. "We have to catch him, though before long or he will spoil everything. All our work will be for nothing."

"We goin' to ketch him too, and when we does, jest let me git at him. That's all I got to say," said Moses sympathetically.

The jungle, hitherto so silent, seemed filled with strange sounds and forebodings that night. Again and again they were startled suddenly by shrill, penetrating cries that pierced the solemn gloom beneath the trees with an awfulness that was appalling.

Oo-hoo hee-cra hee-cra hee-cra caw, caw, caw, rang the frightful sound, first singly and near at hand, only to be joined by others slightly more distant until the

forest was filled with a wild, insane chorus that rose and fell like the wail of tortured creatures in deadly agony. It was enough to make the flesh creep and to freeze the marrow in their bones.

At the first outburst of the unearthly shrieks the men stopped short, and waited in breathless silence. Then, as they suddenly ceased, they looked at one another in questioning bewilderment.

"Do you think that could be the Indians?" whispered Ted in suppressed excitement.

Stanley nodded in assent. "Yes, it must be a way they have of signalling to each other," he replied.

"Then we must have been discovered, for they are all around us."

They waited, not daring to move out of their tracks, for some further demonstration of the fierce monkey-men against whom they had been warned. The minutes dragged slowly past, but nothing happened.

"If they have found us, we are no better off here than anywhere else," said Stanley, finally unable longer to endure the suspense. "So we might as well go on. Maybe we can shake them off our trail or find a place that will offer us some advantage of natural defense in case they attack."

An hour later the same happening was repeated. Again they waited while the demoniacal chorus shattered the brooding silence of the night, and again they resumed the march, not knowing at which turn of the trail they might be set upon by a mad onrush of the bloodthirsty savages.

Throughout the night they had the uncanny feeling of being followed, and constantly watched by unseen foes. They felt the presence of a lurking danger, and several times the crackling of twigs beneath heavy

feet reached their ears. In the solitude of the vast forest the faintest sounds were magnified manifold, but always their eyes, straining in the direction from which the noises came, saw nothing.

Even Snowball, who rode on Ted's shoulder, whimpered and clung about his neck as if fearful of a dread something in the darkness. Usually, the little monkey slept soundly throughout the nightly tramps, but tonight it was different. The very air seemed charged with a mysterious force that presaged catastrophe.

"Thank heaven, daylight is coming at last," said Stanley as they threw down their packs in a dry, little ravine a hundred yards from the pathway they had been following. The patches of sky visible through the tree tops were lighting up with the first, faint tints of coming dawn. "I was never so ready for a good rest in my life."

"Nor I," agreed Ted. "This day is going to be a scorcher though. It is as hot right now as it has been any day at noon before."

"How's the grub holding out, Moses?" Stanley asked the negro as the latter began unpacking the cooking utensils.

"They's deer meat enough fo' breakfas', but no mo'," responded the black.

"Well, let's have it. Perhaps we can pick up something before night, and if not we can open up some of the tinned stuff."

"I wus thinkin' a few palm-buds wouldn't do no hahm about now," Moses suggested.

"What? With Indians all around us? The chopping would draw them like honey draws the bees. We should all be roasted and eaten, probably. Is that what you are fishing for?"

"No, suh!" emphatically. "But I ain't goin' to chop down no trees. I kin climb up jest like if I wus gatherin' cocoanuts."

"Why didn't you climb up before then?"

"'Cause Vicente didn't seem so awful busy an' I figured the wuk of cutting down a few trees wus good exercise fo' him."

Just then their attention was attracted by a slight rustling sound on one side of the ravine. They looked just in time to see the shadowy form of a jaguar glide into view. The great, spotted cat had evidently been following them, for upon reaching the opening it stopped and after sniffing at the ground turned in their direction. Ted rushed for the rifle which had been placed against a tree several yards away. This movement attracted the creature's attention, and after a startled look at the men it turned and bounded away.

"I'll bet that brute has been following us all night," Stanley exclaimed. "That accounts for the twigs we heard snapping in back of us."

"And also explains why we had that feeling of being shadowed all of the time," added Ted. "Think of being followed by that thing in the darkness. Why, it looked as big as a good-sized lion. I wonder what kept it from leaping on us as it might easily have done."

"I suppose not all jaguars are man-eaters," replied Stanley with a shudder. "This one may have been merely curious, but I am not taking any chances in the future. I learned a valuable lesson just now."

"What was that?"

"Never to leave the rifle out of reach for an instant. If that animal had made a rush at us instead of run-

ning away, it could have knocked us over before we could have reached the gun."

While Moses was boiling the palm-buds, and the two Americans were rigging their hammocks in a sheltered spot, a heavy object came tearing its way through the leaves from one of the tallest trees, and landed on the ground with a thud. Upon going to the spot they found that the ground was strewn with round, black objects the size and shape of a cantaloupe, only they were very hard. When they shook one, something rattled inside.

"Let's crack one open to see what is in it," suggested Stanley. "Perhaps it is good to eat." Then, after hammering at it with a stone: "It must be made of cast iron."

"Here is a bigger rock. Look out! I am going to give it a good bang."

"Yo' is makin' a powerful lot of noise," Moses reminded them just in time to check Ted who was about to drop the large rock. "I doan want to git et up by no Indians."

The negro took the heavy ball and with a deft stroke of the machete sliced off one end. A dozen or more brown, three-cornered seeds fell out.

"Nigger-toes," shouted Ted in glee. "I didn't know they grew that way, did you?"

"No, but they are real Brazil nuts, all right. This is a find worth while. We must lay in a supply for future reference. Even if we cannot find anything else to eat, we can live on these a long time."

They ate quantities of the nuts and packed up several parcels of them to add to their meagre reserve store of provisions. Each of the corrugated, cannon-ball-like shells contained from ten to twenty-five of

the delicious nuts, so it was an easy matter to gather all they could carry.

Snowball too was fond of the white, meaty kernels and gorged himself until they feared for his life, and refused his pleadings for more.

As the day wore on the heat increased steadily. Not a breeze fanned the leaves, which drooped in the sultry, sweltering air. Sleep came to the tired wanderers only in fitful spells. Also, Ted felt the coming on of another attack of the fever from which he had suffered immediately after they had entered the lowland; but, an heroic-sized dose of quinine, taken at the first symptom of the approaching sickness, had succeeded in staying its progress, at least for the time being.

Night found them little refreshed but there was no thought of delaying the journey. Again they spent the hours of darkness in travel, making good progress. The chorus of wild voices they had heard on the previous night, and that seemed more properly to belong to the inhabitants of another world, again rang out at frequent intervals, and filled the forest with its ghastly clamor. It was not until dawn of the following morning that they finally discovered what was responsible for the racket.

As they were sitting quietly against the face of the little bluff that had been chosen for their camping site, a large, brown bird walked calmly into the opening and surveyed the strangers deliberately and without signs of fear. It had long legs, and a long neck, but a short, stubby tail. After satisfying its curiosity, it gave a few low *clucks* and started to walk away. It had gone but a few steps when one of the men moved, which was apparently enough to arouse the bird's resentment; up went the little tail over its back with

a sudden jerk, and stretching its long neck it began to fret and scold.

Oo-hoo hee-cra!

"Scat, you miserable pest," exclaimed Ted, hurling a rock at the offending bird. "I am almost gray-headed on account of your infernal cackling, and I'll be hanged if I stand for any more of it."

"That's a big, woodland rail," said Stanley, greatly interested, as the bird ducked just in time to evade the missile thrown by Ted, and with a few angry chuckles disappeared among the trees.

"I've had to stand enough of its railings the last few nights," said Ted. "And it can't come out and insult me in broad daylight like that."

"Anyway, it's a relief to know that it was only a bird and not the Indians."

"The ground is so cool I am not going to bother about the hammock to-day," Stanley continued after a while. "I am too tired to put it up anyway."

He spread a blanket on the damp earth and, following his example, the others did likewise. This indiscretion nearly cost at least one member of the party his life.

Snowball spent the days in play, never straying far from the side of Ted, to whom the little monkey became more strongly attached as time went on. So long as he had something with which to amuse himself he was perfectly contented. He was never so happy as when permitted to play with his master's pocket mirror, and many were the hours he whiled away trying to catch the "other monkey" in back of the glass for which he mistook his own reflection. He would gaze intently into the mirror, then quickly reach in back of it with his hands; an expression of worried

concern always came over his small, black face as his hands closed on the nothingness. Sometimes he varied his antics by trying to stand on his head on top of the glass, or holding it high above him looked into it until he became overbalanced and toppled over.

Snowball was particularly fond of playing with Ted's soap, a smooth, white cake that fitted well into his hands. He did not mean to steal the soap but it simply possessed an irresistible attraction for him, and he was happy if he could only sit quietly and hold it.

However, Ted objected to having his toilet articles used as toys by the monkey, and Snowball knew it. Nevertheless, on every possible occasion he would take it and hold it; if Ted looked around and caught him in the act he would quickly put it back, and shake his hands up and down while his face assumed a penitent expression. But as soon as Ted looked away, temptation overcame him and, watching his master out of the corner of his eyes, he again slyly reached for the attractive plaything.

On this particular day the men slept soundly under the cool protection of the overhanging cliff. Ted was awakened suddenly by Snowball, who leaped on his face with a thud, screaming in a manner he had never heard before. Instantly he sprang to his feet and looked toward the spot on which the frightened monkey's eyes were glued.

Consternation overcame him as he saw a huge, repulsive snake creeping from a crevice in the rock wall, and slowly making its way toward the sleeping Moses. Indeed, the reptile's formidable, arrow-shaped head was already less than a yard away from the unsuspecting man.

Ted awoke Stanley immediately.

"Wake up," he whispered, nudging his sleeping companion. "But don't make a sound or he might wake up too. Look!"

Stanley sat up sleepily and looked in the direction in which Ted pointed; but the instant he saw the great snake, he sprang to his feet and seized the rifle.

"*Shh-h*," Ted cautioned him, motioning frantically for him to keep still. "He mustn't know. One move and he will be bitten. Let him sleep."

But it was too late. Moses, though an unusually sound sleeper, had heard the noise and stirred uneasily. The serpent, now less than a foot from his face, stopped, reared its head high into the air, and gazed down intently at the man, its forked tongue playing in and out of its mouth at lightning speed.

"Don't move; for heaven's sake, don't move, Moses," shouted Ted. "Lie still and pretend you're asleep. If you move a muscle you will be killed. Don't even open your eyes until I tell you."

By this time the snake had continued on its way. The massive, three-cornered head with the staring, beady eyes was now directly over the negro's.

"It's a snake, but don't get excited," Ted continued. "So long as you keep quiet it will not harm you; even if it touches you, don't move. We will kill it."

Moses understood; they knew he did, for his face turned perceptibly paler, but he obeyed Ted's warning and lay as still as death.

"I can't shoot yet," said Stanley, "because I am afraid of hitting you. You're doing fine though. Keep it up a few minutes longer and everything will be all right."

The reptile seemed to understand the value of its position, for it made no effort to move on but glared

at the men, who were running excitedly about, trying to attract its attention. It was a deadly looking creature, six or seven feet long and very thick. The back was of an orange-red color, marked with a series of heavy black crosses that resembled a string of X's. The scales covering its body were large and pointed.

"That must be a bushmaster," Stanley whispered so that Moses could not hear. "It is the deadliest of all South American snakes. Even the cobras of India are not more poisonous."

At that moment an unexpected thing happened. Gliding along the base of the cliff came another and larger snake, but of a solid black color. The newcomer moved so swiftly that it appeared to flow over the ground like a shadow, and made straight for the bushmaster. The latter saw it coming and turned like a flash to meet its assailant. But the black snake had no intention of rushing headlong into danger; it swerved to one side and began circling round and round, at incredible speed, dashing over the prostrate man's legs at each lap, and seeming hardly to touch the ground in its rapid progress around its deadly enemy.

The bushmaster's greenish eyes, ablaze with rage, followed each movement of the attacker; its tail, vibrating among the dry leaves, made a buzzing sound like that of a rattlesnake. Again and again the venomous head shot out in a lightning-like thrust at the fleeting black form that always kept just out of its reach.

Realizing that an elevated position would offer advantages of a strategic nature, the poisonous reptile had slowly drawn its entire length up on the negro's chest. There it lay with only its head rearing a foot or more above the mass of tightly drawn coils.

"Don't move, don't move," both the watchers



“Don’t move, don’t move,” both the watchers shouted to Moses

shouted to Moses. A slight shudder passed over his body and they knew that he had fainted away. This was fortunate, as they were powerless to help him. In fascination they gazed at the jungle drama that was being enacted before their eyes.

The black snake's death circles were constantly growing smaller, but not for an instant did it take its eyes off the bushmaster, which was rapidly becoming bewildered and panic-stricken. The latter's thrusts were now launched blindly in all directions while it emitted loud hisses that sounded like small jets of escaping steam.

At sight of its victim's confusion, the larger reptile grew bolder. For a moment it seemed to lose all caution as it sped past the triangular head.

The watching men saw a flash of white and then the needle-like fangs buried themselves in the fleeting body, which stopped instantly and writhed in agony. At the same time the black snake's head, with wide-open mouth, made a swift lunge, and when the jaws closed it was on the back of the deadly bushmaster's neck. There it clung with a bulldog grip, the long, sinuous bodies of the two snakes writhing and twining about one another in the final death struggle.

Before long the bushmaster weakened; its efforts to shake off the tenacious hold of its enemy grew fainter with each passing minute. Then the victor began working its jaws over the head of the vanquished, never for an instant relinquishing its grip, and when the bushmaster's head was well within the mouth of the black snake, it proceeded to swallow it. This swallowing consisted in drawing itself slowly over the still slightly writhing victim.

The men waited until a foot or more of the poisonous

snake had disappeared from view. The black snake now too was harmless, for with the remaining portion of the bushmaster protruding from its mouth it could not strike even should it so desire.

Stanley slowly approached the great, black form, brandishing his rifle, but it showed no inclination to resent his advance; instead, it withdrew to the crevice in the cliff, dragging the unfinished portion of its meal with it.

Moses recovered consciousness with a start, and springing to his feet, dashed wildly toward the Americans and begged them to protect him.

"It's all over now," Stanley reassured him, "but that was a close call. One move and it would have been all over with you."

They described to the trembling negro exactly what had happened.

"That's the las' time I'll ever sleep on the groun'. I doan want no mo' snake fights on top of this nigger," he said finally. "Did yo' kill the black snake?"

"Not on your life," Stanley replied. "I wish the woods were full of them; they would soon clean out all the other kind, and we wouldn't have to worry about them."

"But he goin' to die anyway," Moses insisted. "Yo' say the other snake bite him square in the middle. Les poke him out an' kill him right off an' doan let him suffer. I doan like no snake nohow jes on general principles."

"It won't die, because it is immune to the bushmaster's poison—the only thing in the world that is. They are its regular food and a bite or two doesn't bother it at all."

Stanley knew that the Muzarama, for that was the

name of the black snake, was by this time comfortably coiled up in the crevice in the rock wall—perhaps already beginning its long sleep. Not until many days later would it again emerge in fighting trim, ready and eager to do battle with another of the deadly terrors of the jungle.

The sun had already disappeared behind the western mountains. Ted and Stanley had arranged their packs and were impatiently waiting for Moses, who was busily engaged packing the cooking outfit.

The report of a rifle, distant, yet unmistakable, suddenly rang through the forest already wrapped in the silence of night. The men looked at one another knowingly. Then three more shots came in quick succession, followed by others, singly and in groups.

"Vicente," said Stanley bitterly. "Who else could it be? And he is in trouble."

"It must be he," Ted agreed. "I'll bet the Indians have discovered him, and he is fighting for his life right now. He wouldn't be foolish enough to fire that many shots without some good cause."

"After the way he acted toward us, I am almost tempted to say it would serve him right. But still, I can't feel that way about it after what we have seen of the monkey-men."

"I too would feel sorry for anything they got their hands on," said Ted. "They are an awful-looking lot."

"All we can do now is hurry ahead in the hope that the Indians have only stopped him and are holding him at bay. If they capture him it will mean the end of our plans, for the ring will be gone forever."

The sky became overcast with black clouds early in the night, and they had only the occasional flashes

of lightning to guide them on their way. In spite of the darkness they kept persistently on until the dawn of the following day, but without finding any trace of Vicente or the Indians.

It was not until the next night that they discovered the first clews of his whereabouts and fate.

The day had been unusually hot and sultry. The sun had been continuously obscured by banks of dark, threatening clouds, and the roll of distant thunder frequently smote the stillness of the moisture-laden air. There was not a sign of life in the jungle; all the birds and beasts had hushed their clatter and remained in hiding. Not a breath of air fanned with its reviving freshness the vegetation that drooped in wilted masses. It seemed as if the world, wrapped in a sombre pall of dread, waited in agony for the breaking of the tropical storm.

With the coming of night the clash of the elements drew nearer. Vivid flashes of lightning lit up the gloom of the forest; they came in such rapid succession that they seemed almost continuous, and the intervals between the growling rumbles of thunder grew shorter and shorter.

Realizing that it was impracticable to travel on such a night, the trio had, after a consultation, decided to remain where they were until the storm had passed. A stanch shelter of palm-leaves was hastily constructed; it would protect them and their belongings from the rain.

As they waited for the first onslaught of the tempest, a rosy glow appeared in the low-hanging clouds. It grew brighter with the passing minutes. Then—the chant of voices, the boom of drums, and shrill wails and cries, exactly like the din they had heard that

night on the bank of the wide, muddy river. The monkey-men were celebrating another one of their wild orgies.

Ted was the first to break the silence.

"This is our chance," he said. "What do you say to our sneaking up to see what they are about?"

"We can leave the things here and come back again," Stanley replied. "I am all in favor of having a look at them, particularly because I think this may have something to do with Vicente."

At first they hastened through the forest but as they neared the place where the celebration was going on they advanced more cautiously. Finally, a spot was reached from which they had a good view of what was taking place.

A clearing several hundred yards across had been made in the heart of the densest jungle. In the centre stood a single tree, only the gnarled and twisted branches of its crown covered with small tufts of leaves visible above an unbroken ring of fire that encircled it a hundred feet or more from its base. A line of Indians, their nude bodies silhouetted black against the leaping flames, was running wildly around the outer border of the fiery circle, shouting, frantically waving their arms, or beating drums. The drums were long and thick, as if cut from hollow trees, and gave out deep-toned *booms* when struck by their bearers.

A wilder and more weird scene cannot be imagined. The flaming circle around the lone tree; the ring of shrieking, naked savages, and the wall of black forest that surrounded the clearing: all made a picture that exceeded the wildest anticipations of the two Americans. They had hoped to get a glimpse of the wild men of the jungle engaged in their natural activities

of life, but they had not thought it possible that such a spectacle could exist.

"That must be the Holy Tree," Stanley whispered after they had watched in silence for some time. "Old Yupanqui said they would offer us as a sacrifice to their tree-god if they caught us. Perhaps they are offering something to the tree now, but I can't see anything, can you?"

"No. I don't see any victim," Ted answered. "I guess they did not get Vicente or he would certainly be the centre of attraction at a celebration of that size. What are we going to do?"

"Nothing. So long as we see nothing to make us believe they have Vicente, their feast is no affair of ours. Besides, they outnumber us fifty to one, so we couldn't do anything if we wanted to."

A dull roar, like the coming of a cyclone, spread over the forest and made itself heard above the howling of the savages. Faint eddies of air stirred the leaves with a sickly whisper, and blew with cold and clammy breath into the faces of the watchers. Then for a moment all was silent with that ominous stillness that immediately precedes some cataclysm of nature. After that the storm was upon them in one mad sweep. A raging gale of wind tore its way through the tree tops bending them low until here and there some aged monarch of the forest yielded to the strain and fell to the ground with a crash.

The heavens were illuminated by brilliant streaks and sheets of lightning, and when the blue-green bolts of fire struck, the earth seemed to tremble in awe and terror. Great drops of rain splashed down through the leaves; soon a solid torrent of water was falling with a roar that drowned all the other noises.

At the first onslaught of the elements Ted and Stan-

ley, followed by Moses, rushed headlong toward their shelter. But when the storm had burst upon them in its full fury they saw that it was futile to try to find their way through the mist and wall of falling water. Drenched and gasping, they stopped under the first friendly palm that offered some protection; there they stood in a shivering, cowering group until the storm-god had spent his greatest violence upon the outraged earth. After that they sought the shelter of leaves that had been constructed earlier in the evening.

The rain stopped with the coming of dawn. As the sun rose the leaves sparkled with the crystal drops that clung to their drooping edges. The forest seemed bedecked with jewels.

Ted and Stanley found sleep impossible. Their minds constantly reverted to the scene they had witnessed the previous evening.

"What do you say to sneaking back to the clearing?" Stanley asked. "It's a pretty risky thing to do, but we might find out what all the racket was about last night."

"I am all in favor of it," Ted replied eagerly. "We can leave Moses here to watch the things. I still can't help thinking that somehow or other Vicente figured in that celebration."

They made their way, slowly and carefully, to the edge of the clearing. Concealed in the thick shrubbery that bordered the open space, they waited the greater part of an hour. There was no sign of the Indians; evidently the storm had frightened them away to their forest shelters and they had not yet returned.

A great tree, with a cavity leading into its hollow interior, stood in the centre of the clearing. Around it lay the blackened circle of charred wood, the fire

having been extinguished by the rain. The ground was bare and hard as the result of having been trampled through a period of many years, perhaps even by generations of the tree-worshippers.

As the minutes passed, the two Americans grew bolder. And finally they ventured out into the open plot. Then they made a series of discoveries, so startling in their nature that the memory of them would remain with them through all the years of their lives.

Strewn about the base of the tree were bones, piles of bleached, white bones of animals and—of men. Some of them were partially covered with earth; others and newer ones lay fully exposed on the surface. There, too, scattered on the ground, just as they had been abandoned by the fleeing Indians, were articles of clothing—Vicente's clothing, and the stolen rifle. They were horrified at the discovery.

But, how were the offerings made to the Holy Tree? What marvellous power did the tree-god possess?

With a feeling of revulsion Stanley went nearer the sacred object of the gruesome worship. The cracked and scaly bark was perforated with millions of minute holes; Stanley tapped it lightly with the muzzle of his rifle. Instantly there poured from each of the myriad of holes a stream of small, dark-red ants; in the twinkling of an eye the tree was covered with them so that it seemed moving and alive. One of the insects dropped on Stanley's hand; he tried to brush it off but it clung with a vise-like grip until he crushed it and pulled out the venomous mandibles one by one. His hand felt as if it had been punctured by a red-hot needle.

The whole, awful truth came to him in a flash. This was indeed the Holy Tree, guarded by countless millions of fire-ants that lived within its hollow trunk.

The superstitious savages believed the tree to be holy for the very reason that it was so well guarded, and to it they brought their victims because it offered such an easy means of disposing of them. It was plain to see how the offerings were made to the tree without exposing the worshippers to the same fate as the captives; also, the method was more spectacular, and provided the always desired opportunity for an impressive ceremony.

After placing the victim within the circle of fire, the Indians could well pursue their wild celebration, for they knew that his doom was sealed. To attempt to break through the burning wall would be futile, for if he escaped with his life it would be only to rush back into the hands of the captors, who were careful to remind him of their presence by their howls and drum-beats as they ran and danced around the outer border of the fire.

As the flames mounted higher, the heat grew more intense, and the victim was driven to seek shelter within the great cavity in the tree trunk, not knowing of the fate that awaited him. Then—the overwhelming avalanche of fire-ants from which there was no escape.

“It’s here.” Ted’s voice was tense with suppressed emotion.

“What is?” Stanley asked, unable to change the trend of his thoughts so suddenly.

“The ring. Sewed in the lining of his coat.”

Ted put the circlet of gold into his pocket. Stanley picked up the rifle that was lying on the ground. Without a word they started back to camp.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CAVE OF DARKNESS

MOSES rejoiced over the recovery of the stolen rifle, but when he asked for the particulars connected with it, they simply informed him that it had been found on the ground. Vicente, they said, had doubtless been captured by the monkey-men. They thought it best not to relate to the negro what they had found in the clearing; it might only arouse his superstitious fears to a point where they interfered seriously with his usefulness.

So far as Vicente was concerned, there was nothing to be done. They were convinced that he had passed beyond the need of their assistance.

The recovery of the ring, looked forward to with such eagerness, yet with so many misgivings, did not fill them with the joy and exultation they had anticipated. If only it had been recovered in some other manner! However, they knew that they were in no way responsible for Vicente's misfortune; he alone had brought it upon himself.

It was not until two days later that they had another view of the monkey-men, and this time the encounter might have cost them their lives.

As usual, the little party was spending the daylight hours in sleep. They had selected a dense clump of bamboos that screened them from the game trail, now narrowed to a mere path winding among the trees. Near by stood a tall palm, gasping its last in the smothering embrace of a wild fig. This latter is to

the trees of the jungle what the boa-constrictor is to the animals.

Starting as a slender creeper, the fig vigorously searches about for some plant that will serve as a support. When one has been reached, usually a tree, it rapidly grows straight up the stem, clinging to the rough bark and sending out thread-like tendrils that completely encircle the trunk. Before long it has attained the top of the tree; with its leaves exposed to the sunlight and open air high above the crowded forest, the plant grows more rapidly than before. The slender stem becomes as thick, often, as the tree upon which it is preying; the thread-like tendrils develop into wide bands of the strength of steel that draw tighter and tighter until the helpless tree is strangled to death. As the foliage of the victim withers and falls, the fig sends out masses of branches covered with large, deep-green leaves, completely enveloping the dead forest giant; then also it brings forth its blossoms as if in celebration of the victory it has won in the mad struggle for life, and produces its fruit.

The fig growing near the clump of bamboo in which the men were sleeping had reached this stage of its existence, and the fruit proved irresistible to Snowball.

At first the little monkey was content to pick up the small red berries that had fallen to the ground; then he cast longing glances at the ones dangling so tantalizingly overhead. Before long, the temptation proved too great, and, casting off his usual caution, he climbed nimbly to the top of the tree. There he sat, forgetting every one and everything except the delicious red berries that hung before his eyes.

Puff! A fiery pain darted through his right shoul-

der, paralyzing it almost instantly. So unexpected was the shock that the monkey lost his hold of the branch on which he had been seated, and fell several feet before he succeeded in saving himself from a longer fall to the ground by grasping a limb with his uninjured left hand.

Puff! This time the fiery sting shot through his left leg, and with a shrill scream of pain and fright he plunged headlong to the ground.

Ted heard the frantic shriek and, bounding from his hammock, seized his rifle and dashed out of the bamboos. The dwarfed, wizened form of a Macaco, blow-gun in hand, stood in the centre of the game trail, not ten feet away. For an instant they stared at one another in astonishment and dismay; then, with a wild howl of alarm, the Indian sprang to one side and disappeared.

Ignoring the fact that their presence had at last been discovered, Ted rushed to the assistance of Snowball, who lay quietly on the ground. He removed the slender arrows from the little animal's leg and shoulder; the points that had penetrated the flesh were black.

"Poisoned," said Ted through clinched teeth. "Poor little pal. It's all over with you now."

The *curare* with which the arrows had been dipped was already exerting its deadly power. This poison, made by boiling down the juice of a species of creeping plant, is commonly used by many tribes of South American Indians. Although the monkey was still alive, he was unable to move a muscle. Ted knew of no antidote, so ere long the *curare* had exacted its full toll, and Snowball was dead.

"I can't tell you how badly I hate to lose the little

fellow," he said sadly to Stanley as he scooped a hole in the earth at the base of a tall palm, and deposited the still form of his pet in it. "He was like one of us and the party won't be complete without him."

"Cheer up," Stanley tried to console him, although he too felt keenly the loss of the little monkey. "It could have been a great deal worse. Let's be thankful it was not Moses or one of us."

"I know, and I am grateful. But just the same, I hate to lose Snowball. He kept all of us in a good humor—which is half the battle on a trip of this kind. It can't be helped though, so we shall have to make the best of it."

"I cannot understand why the Indian did not shoot at you too," Stanley said as they hurriedly prepared to depart, for now that they had been seen, no time was to be lost in getting as far away from that neighborhood as possible. "He might easily have done so, and if there were any others near by, they could have wiped all of us out of existence without any trouble."

"The Macaco was too astonished, just as I was," Ted replied. "But as soon as he has had time to collect his wits he will be back. You can count on that. Listen! He is calling his companions now."

A long-drawn cry, like that of the howling monkey, and which they had heard the Indians use the day they appeared on the river bank to collect fish, now rang through the forest. There was no mistaking it. It was the hunting call of the Macacos.

Before long a second voice answered; then another, and another, from far and near, until the jungle was filled with the gruff howls. Once, in the North Woods, Stanley had heard the pack-cry of the great gray wolves

gathering for the kill; it had not sounded half so terrible as this calling of the monkey-men.

They hurried across the low ridge, and gaining the other side lost no time in putting as much distance as possible between themselves and the collecting savages. This ruse, they hoped, might throw them off the trail. Soon, however, they began to realize how hopeless it was to try to evade the wild men in their native country. The little party was groping in the dark, as it were; the Indians, knowing every foot of the forest, possessed all the advantages. Accustomed to tracking the jungle animals upon which they subsisted, it was an easy matter for them to pick up the spoor of the strange men once they had left the beaten game trail, and to follow it through the trackless wilderness.

Before long the savage calls resounded on that side of the foot-hills to which the little party had just crossed. At first they were in back of them only. The men redoubled their pace, hoping against hope for the discovery of some place in which to hide or that would assist them in warding off the attack they knew would soon be made. By evening the shouts came from all directions. They had been completely surrounded. Then the signalling suddenly stopped; the silence that followed was ominous.

Night came at last, mercifully covering the jungle with a cloak of darkness. Not until then did the fugitives dare pause for the rest they so greatly needed. They were so exhausted from the long flight that they cast themselves on the ground, regardless of the dangers this action incurred.

"I have often wondered how a hunted animal feels when it hears the hounds baying in the distance."

Ted was the first to break the silence. "Now I know."

For a moment Stanley said nothing.

"There is no denying the fact that we are in a serious predicament," he said finally. "Still, we have been in some pretty tight places before and got out of them."

"You are right. The only thing to do is to take as cheerful a view of the situation as we can, and see the thing through."

Moses gave a groan. They could not see his ebon face in the darkness.

"Surely, we have to see it through now. Which-ever way we turn, we are facing the same proposition. They are all around us——"

Again Moses groaned.

"So the best plan will be to go ahead with our work. Let's try to forget the monkey-men——"

Moses groaned louder than ever.

"Forgit yo' is goin' to git et up alive?" he moaned. "I cain't think of nothin' else."

"Yes, forget it," Stanley said. "At a time like this, the less you think of your troubles the lighter they seem. The more you think of them the harder they seem. So let's buck up, all of us, and make the best of a bad situation. Trying to take a cheerful view of it won't hurt any one; on the contrary, it will help a lot. If there's a way out of this, we will find it; if not, we will make one."

"Yo' suttinly kin talk sense," Moses ventured after a slight pause. "I is goin' to stick mighty close to yo' after this."

"Then you are in favor of going ahead, too?" Stanley asked, glad of the effect his speech had on the negro. Then, as he nudged Ted: "We are not insisting on

your coming. You may start back if you have any scruples against——”

“No, suh!” emphatically. “I ain’t got no scroopies or nothin’; I goin’ to stick mighty close to yo’.”

“All right. Let’s have something to eat; we will all feel better then. Who knows, maybe the cave is only a mile or so from here, and we can get to it before morning?”

They tried to be cheerful as they ate the cold, boiled palm-buds, Brazil nuts, and the last of the tinned beef. But to an observer, had there been one, it would have been obvious that they were all laboring under a heavy strain. Although conversing in whispers only, they knew not at what moment the keen ears of an Indian might catch the sound.

The meal finished, they began stealthily to make their way forward. Sleep was out of the question, and everything depended on the possibility of their eluding the monkey-men. Under cover of the darkness, their chances of succeeding seemed reasonably good.

The jungle was still wet and dripping from the heavy downpour of a few nights before. When the sun rose on the following day, much of the moisture was converted into a hot mist, filled with the stench of decaying plants. Even the growing vegetation seemed to exhale a sickening vapor.

The little party, unable longer to continue the difficult walk, halted at daybreak in a narrow gorge through which a small stream of water trickled over moss-covered boulders. This position, they concluded, would give them some advantage in case the expected attack was launched.

The forest was open; by looking over the rim of

the depression they could see a distance of many yards with only the occasional tree trunks to obstruct their view. While one slept, the other two kept watch, rifles in hand and ready for any emergency.

Throughout the morning they had fleeting glimpses of their pursuers. The forest was filled with flitting shadows, but never did the monkey-men tarry long in one spot. One moment a dusky form appeared on one side of the ravine, darting from one protecting tree to another; the next, another was visible for an instant on the other side of them. However, they were careful always to keep at a safe distance, for no doubt Vicente's rifle had taught them to respect the thunder-sticks with which the strangers were armed.

Noon found the trio somewhat refreshed.

"We had better move on," said Stanley. "They are all around us, but I think so long as daylight holds out they are going to let us alone. The suspense of staying here and watching those plotting savages is awful."

"Yes, I think if they had intended attacking in the daytime they would have done so before now. Perhaps those are only the scouts we see, keeping an eye on us until the main party arrives. They have our position marked exactly; there is no shaking them off our trail now."

"We might try moving up the ravine; the high banks will shelter us on both sides, and it may possibly lead to a more protected spot."

Their packs had dwindled down until there remained only the ammunition, photographic outfit, bedding, a few personal articles and instruments; besides this there was the scanty supply of food that still remained. These they could not, of course, dis-

card, but as the weight was inconsiderable, carrying them did not interfere materially with their progress.

The flitting forms that had constantly hovered about during the morning, followed their every movement. They darted here and there, silently as shadows. Yet, their very persistence plainly showed that this action was but part of a carefully arranged plan that would be brought to climax at the proper moment.

"Why don't they do something?" Ted said. The strain was becoming unendurable. "If they would only show their hand! It would be so easy for them to ambush us and end this agony. Why don't they?"

Stanley did not reply; but he had very good reason to believe that the monkey-men much preferred to take them captive alive. Had they not seen the Holy Tree?

They travelled the greater part of the afternoon, and during all of the long, weary night that followed, they walked and rested alternately.

But, daylight again revealed the slinking, shadowy forms dogging their footsteps through the reeking, steaming jungle.

This state of affairs could not continue much longer. If the Indians did not soon either attack or raise the siege, it was up to the Americans to do one of two things; they must take the offensive or give up in despair. The latter they would of course never do.

Toward the middle of the afternoon they reached a part of the gorge where it narrowed somewhat. Straight ahead, towering high above the forest, rose a sheer wall of dark-gray stone; as yet they could not see its base through the trees.

"The mountains," said Ted excitedly. "The big range again; we are headed directly toward it."

"If we can reach it before dark," exclaimed Stanley, "our chance of outwitting that persistent horde will seem almost encouraging. With our backs to the wall we can put up such a fight that the descendants of the survivors will talk about it for generations to come."

"We could hold them off until the food gives out. That will be a day, or two at most."

"A good many things can happen in a day. Let's move on."

Shortly after, they came in view of the base of the mountain that extended upward in a straight line until it lost itself in the haze that crowned its summit. But what interested them more was the fact that the foot of the frowning escarpment had been chosen as a camping site by the Indians; they had occupied this strategic position first. Again the predicament of the little party seemed hopeless.

They crept closer. Screened from view by the walls of the gorge, they could nevertheless by peering cautiously over the top see all that was in front of them. Then they understood why the monkey-men had selected this spot for their rendezvous, for opening into the stone wall was the mouth of a cave. The rivulet flowing through the gorge they had been following came out of the yawning black cavern.

"The cave, the cave!" Stanley exclaimed suddenly. "Look! there it is. We have stumbled right on top of it without knowing it."

Ted looked in astonishment.

"It must be *our* cave," he said in an awed whisper. "It is exactly as Yupanqui said." Then, as he gazed at the Indian encampment: "Those savages knew where we were going, so they calmly let us get into

the very heart of their country knowing that the further we went the surer they would be of catching us. They must have seen some one disappear into it before. This time they are not taking any chances on being outwitted again."

There were scores of the monkey-men along the base of the unscalable precipice. Here and there a small family party was squatting around a fire, apparently roasting its food. Others were strolling unconcernedly about, blow-gun in hand. Still others were gathered in little groups, engaged in animated conversation accompanied by many wild gestures. All of them were constantly casting furtive glances in the direction of the ravine.

After looking over the lay of the land carefully, the three, with pounding hearts, retraced their steps to a spot where a great, uprooted tree had fallen across the gorge. Under cover of this shelter they halted for a consultation.

"Now, there is just one thing for us to do," said Stanley with a show of great emotion. "We have to take the initiative. In war, as in football, it is the offensive that wins the battle. Those beasts have their big party all planned for to-night. We must beat them to it. From the looks of things there must be hundreds of them. If they rush us we are lost. If we take them by surprise, we can break through their line."

"How I wish I had a rifle, too!" Moses wailed. "I ain't got nothin' to fight with."

"Another rifle would be valuable because it would make just that much more noise. We are not going to shoot anybody, if we can help it. I have a better plan. It will keep us busy though; there isn't a minute to lose."

They quickly unrolled their packs and extracted the photographic supplies and a quantity of powder.

"Don't you think one of us ought to stand guard?" Ted asked anxiously, peering over the rim of the gorge. "There are dozens of them darting around on both sides."

"No. We can take a peep now and then, but I am sure they are waiting for nightfall. Just now they are only watching to see that we do not escape through their lines. It will keep all three of us hustling to fix this little surprise for them, and we must have it ready on time."

Ted quickly fell in with the plan that Stanley now disclosed.

"Lucky for us the kodak films are done up in tin tubes," he said. "They will make first-rate bombs."

As they worked, their spirits rose. Toward the close of the afternoon they were even chuckling at the fun they were going to have at the expense of the monkey-men.

"Half of these ought to be enough to do the work," said Stanley, surveying the result of their labor with satisfaction. "But better have too many than not enough. We cannot take the slightest chance at having our scheme fail at the last minute."

Before him lay twenty-five of the tin film cans, their lids fastened back in place with adhesive tape. Ten of them had been filled with heavy charges of powder that had first been tightly packed into little tubes rolled of paper; four of the tubes tied into a bundle had been placed in the centre of each can, after which they tamped them into place with small pebbles. The other fifteen tins had been loaded with flash-light powder. From one end of each can dangled a fuse.

"It's too bad to use all of our flash-light powder; and those twenty-five rolls of film will soon spoil in the hot, damp climate without their tin containers, so we might as well throw them away. But I can't think of a better use to which to put the stuff."

Ted agreed with him that the material was being expended in a better cause than that for which it originally had been intended.

Moses was the only one of the trio to express any doubts as to the outcome of their plan.

"Suppose they doan go off?" he asked anxiously. "Then what?"

"I will test one of the powder ones if you say so," Stanley promptly replied. "Stand on it and let me light the fuse."

"No, suh, not me," Moses hastened to say. "I'll take yo' wud fo' it that they's all right."

Before darkness had fully obscured the jungle the Indians lighted a chain of fires that completely surrounded the spot in which the party was hiding. They could not see the fires, but the ruddy glow was all around them. Against it, the tree-trunks were outlined like a maze of straight, black columns.

"The ingenuity of those savages beats everything," said Stanley as the fiery glare grew steadily brighter. "They are going to make sure of us. It would be impossible to break through that circle of light without being seen."

In the tropics night falls rapidly. There is not the long twilight of a temperate clime. Without much warning the brassy sun sinks beneath the horizon and it is night.

The darkness was appalling. Low storm-clouds coming up from the east obscured the starlight, but

this was an advantage to the three men about to make a dash through the host of Indians that surrounded them.

From somewhere down the gorge came the reverberating booms of war drums. Soon a chorus of shouts and howls coming from the same direction joined the drum-beats, making a hideous din. A frightened animal, probably a deer, dashed up the gorge, past the trio of crouching men; in a moment it returned, speeding in the opposite direction and snorting with terror.

"Now is the time," said Stanley, tense with excitement.

The three packs had been tied together into one; it did not weigh over forty pounds, and was but a light burden for the powerful Moses. Ted and Stanley carried the rifles and the missiles that had been prepared that afternoon. They advanced cautiously until they came in sight of the entrance of the cave, lighted up by a huge fire that blazed and crackled on each side. Undoubtedly the only thing that prevented the savages from blocking the opening of the cavern with fire was the fact that the stream flowing out of it made this impossible.

Double ranks of the monkey-men stood along the base of the escarpment; each held a short, stout club in his hands. Obviously their method of taking captives that were intended for the Holy Tree was to knock them down and then pounce upon them. They were expectantly watching the mouth of the gorge where it opened upon the little, level plot facing the cave.

So far the three, concealed by the high banks of the cut, had not been seen by the Indians. They halted and prepared for the offense.

Stanley gave the wheel of his lighter a whirl and blew the tinder cord until it smouldered.

"We will throw a few of the flash-light powder bombs first, by way of introduction," he whispered. "And follow them right up with several loaded with pebbles. After that it won't make any difference which kind we throw. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Then let them have it. Keep your eyes closed after the first round so the light won't affect them."

When the first missiles, with sputtering fuses, fell in their midst, the monkey-men stared at them in dumb silence. Then, *puff, puff, puff*,—the brilliant flashes of bluish flames lighted up the jungle as bright as day. These were followed immediately by the loud explosions of the tins loaded with powder and pebbles. The effect was instantaneous. Blinded by the flashes, and howling with pain from the pelting of small stones on their bare skin, the savages broke into a wild, disordered flight. More grenades burst among them. They clutched at their legs and bodies, shrieking, running into trees and falling over one another in their mad scramble to get away from the unknown terror that was inflicting such painful punishment upon them.

When the supply of bombs was exhausted, Stanley and Ted discharged their rifles into the tree-tops a few times in rapid succession, by way of parting salute; then the party made a dash for the cave. When they were well within the darkened interior they halted.

"I never saw anything so funny in my life," said Ted. "If they want any more of us, let them come on; in here we could stand off the whole mob without any trouble. But, I'd bet they won't come back."

"You are right, they won't. They got enough to

last them a long time. Besides, they will be so busy nursing their bruises for the next few days, they will have time for nothing else."

"Yo' suttinly did fix 'em good," said Moses with a chuckle. "Let's make mo' bumbs an' fight 'em agin."

"No! The scheme worked all right that time because we took them by surprise. But now they would be expecting it and would be prepared. We should have to study up some new scheme. Here's hoping though that we have seen the last of the monkey-men."

"I hope so too," said Moses fervently. "Are yo' shore they won't foller us in here?"

"Pretty sure. Low country Indians are very superstitious about caves and mountains. They look upon them as the homes of evil spirits."

"Well, here we are, in the cave at last," said Ted, abruptly changing the subject. "Have you the candles and matches handy?"

Moses promptly produced the desired articles. The flickering, yellow candle-light revealed a low, narrow passage leading straight into the solid rock formation. The floor was smooth and level and covered with flowing water several inches deep. On one side was a ledge that might serve as a footing.

Although the party was on the verge of exhaustion from the lack of sleep, and the trying experiences of the past few days, there was no possibility of securing the needed rest until a suitable place could be found in the cavern. The only thing to do was to follow along the narrow pathway in the hope that it would widen or lead to some subterranean gallery that afforded more room.

The ledge led gradually upward into the mountain

mass, although, so far as they could tell, the floor of the passage remained level. Soon they were high above the trickling watercourse; eventually they lost the sound of it altogether. When they peered down over the rim of their precarious footing, it was only to stare into absolute blackness which the feeble candle-light could not penetrate.

They picked their way slowly and carefully. One misstep, and they should have been hurled to the rocky bottom many feet below.

"We have gone about a thousand yards now," Stanley broke the silence. "I have been counting the steps. There is a step-off ahead but it is not very deep. I can just see the bottom of it. Shall we jump?"

The others crowded forward and holding their candles over the edge of the brink, looked down. They could see the continuation of the shelf below them; it appeared fully twice as wide as the part they were on.

"We can make it all right," Ted decided. "It looks wide enough to sleep on. Let's get down."

So saying he crawled over the edge and, after clinging to it an instant, dropped.

"It's a little lower than it looked," he called up from below, "but not very much. Come on."

Stanley followed. Then Moses tossed down their things, after which he too dropped to the lower level.

"How's we goin' to git back up agin?" he asked after he had landed with a thud.

"We don't want to get back up," Stanley informed him. "We are going to get out through the other end."

"But supposin' they ain't no other end?" persisted Moses.

"Then we are just as well off in here as out there, with the monkey-men laying for us. How about a little sleep?"

The others agreed that sleep would be indeed welcome.

"It is eleven o'clock now," said Stanley, looking at his watch. "We can sleep until six in the morning. Whoever wakes up first, call the others. Shall we keep a candle burning?"

"Yes, leave 'em all buhn," Moses answered quickly.

"No, let's save them; we might need them before we get out," said Ted. "I do not think there is anything in here to be afraid of."

The air in the cavern was cold and damp. Also, it was heavy with a peculiar, disagreeable odor.

The men spread their blankets on the moist, shelving rock. Then they extinguished the candles.

As sleep was stealing rapidly over them, they were brought back to consciousness suddenly by a succession of queer sounds that emanated high above their heads. There was at first a dull roar, interspersed with shrill squeaks and a grating noise like the gnashing of teeth. Listening intently, they could after a few minutes distinguish the heavy flutter of wings that seemed to be circling above them and were gradually drawing nearer.

"Bats," said Ted, sitting up with a start. "Listen to the racket they are making. There must be thousands of them."

"Probably they belong to the fruit-eating kind. They will not bother us," said Stanley sleepily. "Their presence in such large numbers explains that peculiar odor."

"They are getting pretty close though. One just

fluttered around my head. I thought it was going to light."

Stanley became more interested. He struck a match and lit one of the candles.

The flutter of wings now came from all around them. Occasionally one of the black forms hurtled into the sphere of mellow candle-light, circled once or twice in its erratic flight, and darted out of sight again into the darkness.

"They are pretty bold for fruit-bats," Stanley decided. "They act more like vampires."

Five minutes later the bats were descending in such vast numbers that there was a constant eddy of the bloodthirsty creatures swirling about the men, waiting for a favorable opportunity to attack. They paid no attention whatever to the candle, and several times the wavering flame was snuffed out by the membranous wings of the bats as they swooped past.

With each passing minute they grew bolder. Finally, one of the vampires darted straight at Moses, and struck the back of his neck. He dislodged it with a quick blow of his hand; but even in that brief interval of time a sharp cut had been inflicted that bled profusely.

Others followed the same tactic. Before long the men were kept busy striking at the vicious bats that were determined not to lose the meal so conveniently placed within their reach.

"This is getting terrible," said Ted in exasperation. "We can't keep it up all night. I am about done for now."

"I was just thinking the same thing. We shall have to keep moving. That is the only way we can keep them off."

Getting together their effects, the party started onward again. It was painful work, and they knew not at which moment some one of them might succumb to the fatigue that was weighing them down. A half-hour later they heard the faint rush of water, as of a small cataract leaping over the brink of a precipice, and dashing itself to spray a great depth below. When they reached the spot, the passage suddenly opened into a chamber of considerable size. The ledge joined the even, level floor; on one side of the junction the floor fell off in a drop; it was over this precipice that the small stream was hurling itself to be lost in the black abyss below.

Further progress was blocked by a pool of water that seemed to cover the greater part of the floor of the chamber. Nor did their lights reveal any other opening leading from this cavern.

Lines of the vampires were already filtering in from the tunnel the men had just left.

"We might try rolling up in our blankets," Stanley suggested. "Perhaps they can't bite through. I hope not, for it is our last chance."

They followed his suggestion. Fortunately the two thicknesses of blanket were too much for the vampires' short teeth. However, great numbers of the repulsive creatures continued to hover about the still, huddled-up forms; some of them settled, and crawled and fluttered over them in the hope of finding an opening through which they could gorge themselves on the coveted blood.

At first the men felt far from comfortable as they listened to the frettings of the swarm of bats; but tired nature could endure up to a certain point only, and when that had been reached they fell fast asleep.

They did not awake until almost noon. The attacking vampires had disappeared to the lofty ceiling of the chamber where they had arranged themselves in clusters, clinging head downward to wait until instinct should tell them that the world without was again wrapped in the darkness of night, when they should sally forth on their ghastly maraudings.

As the three men arose from the none too refreshing slumber, they could make out the faint shimmer of water ahead. In breathless anticipation they hastened to the margin of the pool of clear, limpid water. In its depths was mirrored a subdued, bluish radiance, interspersed with blotches of brighter light. They turned their gaze upward in an endeavor to detect an opening in the roof of the cave; their eyes met only the impenetrable blackness.

Ted and Stanley were astonished almost beyond belief, for the light unquestionably came from the bottom of the water. They recalled the dying chief's words: "At the end of the cave you will see a crystal pool glowing with the subdued light of heaven, for while within there is only the blackness peopled with invisible forms and the chill of death, yet in the bottom of the pool will you see the blue sky and the golden sunlight." So far, each of his statements had been proven true to the letter.

Ted cast the ring into the crystal water. Then, in awestruck silence, they waited.

CHAPTER XV

THE HIDDEN VALLEY

SCARCELY had the flood of ripples caused by the splash of the ring into the water faded away, than the patches of light also vanished from the depths of the crystal pool. A shadow had fallen over the source of the uncanny radiance, and the cave was filled with the blackness of midnight. But it was for a brief moment only; suddenly, and without a warning sound a portion of the forward wall of the cavern seemed to melt away, admitting a flood of mellow daylight.

At first the three men crouching on the margin of the pool were blinded by the sudden inflow of light, but as their eyes became accustomed to the change they saw that a huge stone was noiselessly swinging outward, thus opening up a passage into the outer air.

When the massive portal had swung wide open a youth stepped into the breach, and with expressionless face stared at the three strangers. He was short, well-proportioned, and had regular, even handsome features. His color was a dark shade of brown. Sandals of some light-colored material protected the soles of his feet; they were fastened by wide bands that crossed over the arches, and were wound neatly about the ankles. On the top of his head and completely concealing his hair was a turban of colored cloth. The thing that caused Ted and Stanley to gape in astonishment was the short, sleeveless tunic that covered his body; it was made of bright, shining disks of yellow metal,

the size of dimes, held together by small links, and was not unlike the suits of mail worn by warriors hundreds of years ago. A wide girdle of the same metal gave form to the garment. His arms and legs were bare.

Evidently the men in the cave were not what the messenger had expected to find. He hesitated, but for a moment only. Then, without show of surprise, he spoke in a clear, steady voice.

"Come," he said simply in the Quichua language, and led the way out into the bright sunshine.

The three needed no second invitation. They stepped through the portal. Instantly the great rock swung back into place. They could not see by what manner of mechanism it was operated nor who controlled its movement. The heavy door fitted so accurately into the face of a bluff that from a little distance it was impossible to tell just where it was.

To one side lay a pool of clear water, the bottom and sides lined with plates of burnished metal that extended far above the surface. These mirror-like plates reflected the light up under a hanging ledge of rock that divided the pool into two sections one of which was outside, and the other inside the cave. That accounted for the shimmer they had seen in the black room of the cavern. Also, the outer section appeared to be much the deeper of the two; therefore the ring, when thrown into the pool, had slid along the smooth bottom until it was visible to the waiting sentinel. When he plunged into the water for the golden circlet, his shadow had momentarily excluded the light.

Springs, pouring from moss-hung crevices in the rocks above the basin, kept it filled with clear, cool water, and notches cut into the surrounding boulders

provided seats and lounges for a number of persons. Probably the pool had been fitted up as a bath—the Indians no doubt attributing curative powers to the streams that gushed out of the face of the rock.

A hut of substantial build stood near by. In front of it were a score of youths, not unlike the messenger in size and appearance, but their tunics were of coarse, gray cloth—the dress of the soldiers as the Americans were to learn later. They were armed with long lances tipped with copper points. An officer, distinguished by a wide, blue girdle, headed the little detachment. They gave evidence of the rigid discipline to which they were accustomed by standing perfectly motionless with eyes looking straight ahead, as the guide followed by the three tired and bedraggled strangers filed past.

The messenger spoke not a word, and as Ted and Stanley were too filled with amazement for speech, the party proceeded in silence.

The way—a wide, level road paved with blocks of hewn granite—led through a narrow, winding cut flanked on both sides by steep slopes covered with groves of palms and other tropical trees. Near the highway, the inclines were carpeted with a mass of vines and creepers with dark green, velvety leaves, and bearing myriads of clusters of white and scarlet trumpet-flowers.

The messenger, his golden tunic glistening in the bright sunlight, walked at an even, rather rapid pace. When they had gone a distance of a few hundred yards the defile through which they had been passing came to an end. Before them lay a wide, green valley; just how wide, it was impossible to say, but the distance across could not have been less than twenty miles.

The ends of the valley were not to be seen: the cheerful expanse stretched north and south far as the eye could reach.

On both sides rose a stupendous chain of mountains, forming walls that completely hemmed in the flat stretch of landscape. Their lower slopes were green; above that the stern, gray rock rendered the growth of vegetation impossible. Nowhere were the summits of the mountains visible; where they should have appeared, was only an endless band of yellowish haze that made the dark mountain masses look as if their tops had been cut off by one clean stroke of a gigantic knife. The sickly haze extended far up into the blue heavens where it finally lost itself in scattered whisps and cloudlets that, tossed and rent by the strong winds of the higher altitudes, were gradually dispersed and lost to view.

All these things the two Americans saw vaguely only. Their minds were so filled with the wonder and strangeness of their new surroundings that they walked on as in a dream. As for Moses, he followed like the faithful, docile fellow that he was, scarcely daring to look to right or left. It was enough for him that Ted and Stanley did not seem afraid or dismayed. He had seen them get into—and out again of—serious and hazardous situations before; he trusted them implicitly as to the future.

After emerging from the narrow cut flanked by the abrupt, verdure-laden slopes, the road widened into a great thoroughfare that skirted the base of the mountains. Numerous smaller but equally well-paved paths branched from the main course and led into the valley; others led up the slope.

They followed the guide a distance of several miles, meeting wayfarers at frequent intervals, but the In-

dians kept to their side of the road, passing one another on the left, and paying no attention to the strangers. This struck Ted and Stanley as being remarkable; surely, the sight of white men in the hidden valley was without precedent, and must have filled the inhabitants with curiosity. But if they felt any misgivings, they showed not a trace of it. Their faces were as expressionless as if made of bronze, so well did they succeed in concealing their emotions.

Arrived at the first settlement, the messenger escorted the party into one of the stone houses.

"This will be your abode," he said. "Until your arrival can be made known to Manco Capac, long may he live. You are at liberty to come and go as you wish within the confines of the village. Your wants will be provided for. One week from to-day shall I return and announce to you the pleasure of the Inca."

So saying he departed, leaving the little party standing within the doorway of the house, in a confused and spellbound group.

Moses was first to speak.

"How we ever goin' to git out of here?" he asked, anxiously casting uneasy glances about the room.

"Out?" Ted exclaimed in surprise. "Why, man alive, we just got in. Don't talk about leaving already. Time enough to think about that a few weeks from now."

"Am I asleep, or am I awake?" Stanley interrupted. "Pinch me so I will know it is not a dream. I can't believe that the hidden valley actually exists, and that we are in it. It is too good to be true."

"That's exactly the way I feel," Ted replied. "Sort of numb and wobbly all over."

"I guess it is not a dream. We are here at last, and

we shall have to see the thing through. I am willing to admit though that I did not quite understand what it means to get in here among these people, absolutely cut off from the outer world. It's more of an undertaking than I thought."

"One thing that encourages me is the fact that they don't pay any attention to us," Ted said. "The messenger was most courteous, but the others did not even notice us, so I think we are pretty safe."

"Yes, I think there is no immediate cause for anxiety. Probably our whole future depends on the way we impress the Inca. No doubt he will send for us, or send one of his agents to look us over and report to him. He will want to know all about his brother, because he may suspect something when the messenger brings him the ring. We must be careful not to offend him or anyone else in any way, always remembering that we are absolutely at their mercy," Stanley advised. "Now let's take a look around and get acquainted with the place. Maybe we can get over this feeling of strangeness then."

"I wish we had been here a week already. Then we would be over this creepy feeling. But, as we have not been, the thing to do is to keep so busy at something or other that the time will pass quickly. A week is a long time to wait."

The dwelling that had been allotted to them was made entirely of stone with the exception of the high-peaked roof, which was of grass thatch. There were no windows but light was admitted to the interior through rows of small openings below the caves. The floor was of hard-packed earth.

The room they had entered contained only a few stone benches. The two adjoining rooms were fitted

up as sleeping quarters. There were low, wide bunks built up of earth and covered with layer upon layer of thick, woollen blankets. Spread over the top of each was a robe made of vicuña skins, similar to some they had seen in the market of Cuzco, but of much finer workmanship. Each robe was made of about two hundred small, oblong pieces of skin taken from the necks of the fleet-footed animals. The fur was soft as silk, and the patches had been sewn together so neatly that it was hard to find the seams.

Beyond the bedrooms was a corridor that led into a garden in the rear of the house. A spacious though low kitchen had been built on one side of the passage, and a storage room for food on the other. The former contained a primitive fireplace in the centre, consisting merely of a number of large stones on which the earthenware pots rested while the fire could be kindled between and around them; the latter was stocked with baskets and bags of potatoes, peanuts, and other provisions.

They found the garden a delightful spot with wide-spreading trees, broad-leaved banana palms, tomato-vines that formed arbors high above their heads and were laden with small, red fruit, and a number of plants they did not know. In the centre was a deep, stone basin or bath into which a rivulet of water poured through a metal tube set in the stonework.

"This is wonderful," Ted commented, somewhat recovered from his earlier astonishment and misgivings. "We can make ourselves right at home here and be perfectly comfortable. Suppose we try the bath and wash our clothes too, while Moses ransacks the pantry and cooks something to eat. I am almost starved."

Moses started a fire in the kitchen, while the two

Americans divested themselves of their soiled clothing and began to splash about in the cool water.

"Hey Moses! bring the soap," Ted called toward the house. "Bring my toilet soap, and also what's left of the laundry soap."

In a moment the negro appeared. To their dismay they saw that he was followed by half a dozen Indians—all middle-aged, and clothed in coarse one-piece garments of a brownish color.

Moses appeared speechless with fright, but led the way straight to the pool. The Indians followed in double file. When they reached the edge of the basin they bowed low and murmured in an even drawl:

"Command us; we are at your service."

Ted and Stanley looked at one another inquiringly.

"What are we going to do?" Ted asked. "We don't need them for anything."

"Do you think they have been sent to wait on us?"

"Yes! Some one has sent them to be our servants, I take it, but we don't need them."

"I should say not. Not *six* of them anyway. Let's thank them, and tell them they may go."

"All right. You tell them."

The Indians, with solemn faces, were waiting to be commanded.

"We thank you for your kind offer," Stanley began in his best Quichua. "But we have a cook and we do not need anybody else."

Again the Indians bowed low, and one of the leading rank who seemed to be in charge of the party said:

"But we have come to serve you. Command us. Your will is our law."

"We do not want any one to serve us but the black

man," Stanley protested, pointing to Moses. "We have nothing for you to do, so you may go."

A third time they bowed low.

"We cannot go because we have come by order of the *curaca* [chief]," the spokesman replied. "His commands must be obeyed under penalty of death. Therefore, I beg you, let us stay. We will serve you faithfully and well."

"We have no doubt of that, but we cannot use you; it would only be a waste of your time."

"Still must we remain," the Indian insisted as they all bowed.

"For heaven's sake, let them stay," Ted said, greatly amused. "Tell them they can remain if they will stop the bowing. They remind me of a flock of ducks."

When Stanley conveyed this information to the Indians they seemed greatly pleased. Pointing to the others, their leader assigned them to their various duties.

"Chunga will prepare the food," he said, "and Pusa will serve it. Yaycuy and Idma will perform the menial tasks about the dwelling, while Piri and I, Urco, will be the personal attendants of the *caru-caru-llaktayoc* [meaning foreigners or those belonging to a region a great distance away]."

"Very well," said Stanley with an airy wave of his hand. "So be it, and see that your work is well done. Let the food be prepared immediately. Also, here are clothes to be washed; is there anything we can wear while they are drying?"

"Yes, great and noble masters. Piri and I, Urco, will fetch them."

The six marched away without further comment. Ted sent Moses with them, with instructions to look

after their effects, and be of such assistance as he could.

"Now what do you think of that!" Ted exclaimed when they were out of sight. "They must think we are somebody great to treat us like that. If the folks at home could only see us now—with six servants to wait on us."

"We might as well have them, since they insisted. I suppose it is the custom here. If we did our own work we would lose 'caste'; if we let them do it for us they will respect us, so let them go as far as they like. We have to make a favorable impression, remember, if we want to get along with these people and succeed in our venture," Stanley said thoughtfully.

In a few minutes the two personal attendants returned. They brought pliable leather sandals, and short, wide breeches, tunics and fringed shawls—all made of finely spun and closely woven white wool. The last-named articles were handsomely embroidered in various colors.

When the two Americans, with the aid of Urco and Piri, had put on these garments, they presented a curious appearance. The two Indians had also brought an outfit of a yellow color for Moses; he protested vigorously against wearing it, but a word from Stanley was sufficient to silence his objections. The things fitted him badly, on account of his great size, and the sandals were very much too small, so his feet remained bare.

"It's nice and cool in the garden, so why not stay out here until dinner is ready?" Stanley suggested as they were leaving the pool. "You stay too, Moses, and take a rest."

"Certainly," Ted agreed. "We can afford to lounge around and take life easy. Besides, I think we are entitled to a vacation after the trip we have just finished. I am beginning to feel like a prince or a mogul or something already. We had better enjoy our exalted station while the enjoying is good. In a week, perhaps——"

"Let the future take care of itself. I am pretty confident now that everything will turn out all right. Anyway, worrying will certainly not make it any better."

From a distance, they saw Chunga, the cook, cut down one of the tall banana palms laden with a heavy bunch of green fruit. Ted was greatly surprised at this action.

"I wonder why he is cutting down the whole plant," he said. "Why spoil it that way when he could simply chop off the bunch; and besides, the bananas are still green."

"Bananas are always green when they come to the stores at home," Stanley remarked. "Because they wouldn't keep if shipped after they are ripe. They have to cut them while they are hard and green."

"Yes, for shipping. But these are to be used right here, so wouldn't they be much better if they let them ripen on the plant?"

Moses, who had been listening to the conversation, hastened to enlighten them.

"They always chops down the whole stalk 'cause it jist bear one bunch an' die. A new sprout or sucker come up right off an' bear another bunch, when the ole one is down an' out of the way."

"But why are they picking them green?" Ted persisted.

"They never lets 'em git ripe on the bush; if they did, the fruit busts open when it turn yellow, an' the fruit-bats eats it up. They always has to pick it green an' hang it in the house to turn."

"That explanation is perfectly satisfactory, Moses. I never knew all that before, and I would bet a good deal that not many other people know it unless they have visited the tropics."

A short time later Pusa announced that the meal was ready. They hastened toward the house and found the food arranged on the floor of the corridor, in a row of pots and kettles. Blankets on which to seat themselves had been spread on the ground, and there were artistically decorated bowls, cups, and spoons.

The food consisted of roast meat having a mutton-like flavor—their first taste of llama; beans, potatoes, green corn on cob, hominy each kernel of which was the size of a silver quarter; a huge bowl of strawberries and another of blackberries, and a loaf of corn bread completed the repast.

The men ate ravenously, as they were almost famished, and Pusa made frequent trips to the kitchen to replenish the empty dishes.

"This is exploring *de luxe*," Ted said between mouthfuls. "They certainly know how to be hospitable; I never imagined Indians had so many good things to eat."

"Most Indians haven't. Take the Macacos, for example," from Stanley. "But Peru is the home of so many food-plants that the world to-day could not get along without them. The potato is only one of many; but about six billion bushe's are grown each year outside of Peru. All the things we just had are

native to this part of the high Andes, and probably we shall see others as the days go by."

This conjecture proved correct. The following day they had sweet potatoes, tomatoes, Lima beans, pimentos, and peanuts; and during the week that followed the list was varied constantly.

Ted and Stanley did not wander far from the dwelling that had been given over to their use. They saw few Indians. The villagers were either at work in the fields, or remained ensconced in their houses.

Most of the domiciles were in groups of from six to twelve small houses surrounded by a stone wall, and Urco explained that each cluster was occupied by the families of a different clan. There were some thirty-odd of these groups in the settlement. The streets were straight and well-paved, but narrow, with the single exception of the great thoroughfare on which the Americans had arrived.

Terraces faced with stones covered the mountainsides, mounting one above the other like an endless, gigantic stairway. They provided narrow shelves of soil, and all of them were under cultivation. The amount of labor expended in building the innumerable terrace walls and in filling in the earth must have been enormous, and doubtless extended over a period of hundreds of years. But the acreage of the valley was limited; every available foot of ground had to be cultivated to provide for the numerous population; so finally it had become necessary to construct the hanging gardens regardless of the amount of work involved in order that there might be no scarcity of food.

The week in the village passed slowly for Ted and Stanley. They lived in comfort, their every want

supplied in abundance. This was fortunate, as the trials and hardships of the long journey through the jungle had left them on the verge of exhaustion. Even one week of complete rest and the abundance of nourishing food went far toward restoring their usual strength and health.

On the seventh day they waited eagerly for the return of the messenger. "One week from to-day shall I return to announce to you the pleasure of the Inca," he had said. Night came without a word from him. The eighth day dawned—and drew to a close, and still no sign of the youth who had gone to carry the tidings of their arrival to the king.

On the ninth day their disappointment was so great that Urco noticed their crestfallen appearance. He hastened to inquire the reason for it, and Stanley confessed their concern over the non-return of the messenger.

"The week is past," he said in conclusion. "In fact, he is two days overdue."

Urco showed no signs of alarm, or emotion of any kind.

"Nine days ago did Mayo, the king's messenger, depart," he said. "Not until to-morrow may we expect his return, for are not the weeks ten days long?"

So that was the explanation. Instead of seven days, they allowed ten to the week. Ted and Stanley had indeed entered into another world.

At noon on the tenth day the youth put in his appearance. He was accompanied by a company of one hundred picked soldiers, and their officers in bright-colored and richly ornamented uniforms. Also by a score of menials bearing bags and parcels of various sizes.

The column halted in the street in front of the house. Only the messenger and one officer—the latter a special envoy from the Inca—entered. Ted and Stanley were awaiting them with pounding hearts.

The gorgeous officer threw back his heavily embroidered mantle, revealing a golden suit of mail studded with glittering jewels.

As the Americans came forward to meet him, he raised his right hand above his head in salutation.

“I come, honorable strangers from the outer world, at the command of Huayna Capac, my lord and king, long may he live, to extend to you his greetings,” he said impressively. “These poor gifts,” pointing to the parcels on the shoulders of the menials waiting in the street, “has he sent you as a token of his friendship. Also, a detachment of the Royal Archers to serve as an escort of honor. It is the will of the revered father that you appear before him without delay. A heavy shadow has fallen upon his heart; he is wrapped in sorrow. These many days have signs and omens of evil import made known to him that some calamity has befallen Yupanqui, his beloved brother. You bring tidings of him?”

“We do,” Stanley said faintly. He was almost overcome with excitement.

“Then must we be on our way. The Patallacta [City on the Hill] lies a four days’ journey from here. We must hasten lest the grief that enshrouds our venerable sovereign overwhelms him before we arrive.”

“Very well,” Stanley said simply. “The will of the king shall be done. For the hospitality we have enjoyed, and for these gifts, we can only express our gratitude and appreciation. When shall we start?”

"With the rising sun of the morrow. Until then, rest you well."

Again raising his right hand above his head, the officer drew the folds of his cloak about him with a majestic flourish and departed.

The menials now brought in the presents that had been sent by the Inca. The packages half filled the room.

"I still can't make up my mind that I am not dreaming," Ted said with a sigh.

"And I am dying to know what is in those parcels," Stanley said eagerly. "Urco, Piri, Chunga, Moses; all of you. Undo the wrappings. Spread the things out on the floor, and be careful that nothing is broken."

Without a word the men began to untie the thongs that held in place the coverings of the packages.

CHAPTER XVI

IN THE PRESENCE OF THE INCA

TED and Stanley looked on eagerly as the Indians removed the coverings from the packages; and before long a curious assortment of objects was lined up on the floor. They had formed no conjectures as to what the presents might be, but gifts from a king, they thought, should be of a magnificent nature.

The first thing to be disclosed to their view was a basket filled with wild ducks, dried and cured in a peculiar manner, and giving off a musk-like odor.

Stanley picked up one of the birds gingerly, examined it, and then handed it to Ted.

"We had better give them to Chunga," he said; "he will know how to prepare them. They must be considered a great delicacy, but I am not so sure we shall find them to our liking. They look like mummies."

"Maybe they are mummies," Ted suggested. "They might be relics of some sort. Better find out what they are intended for or we might make a bad break and offend the people."

Stanley called to Urco. "We will intrust the preparation of these ducks to you," he said tactfully.

Urco was delighted. "Fortunate indeed are you, *caru-caru-llaktayoc*, that the Inca has singled you out as marks of his special favor. None but his royal kinsmen and the nobles of the highest rank may scent their garments with this sacred and precious perfume."

"Perfume?" Ted asked incredulously before he could check himself, but Urco seemed not to mind.

"Yes. I shall grind the ducks with greatest care, and when the powder is of such fineness that the bees would mistake it for the pollen of flowers, then shall I strew it on your vestments, so that all who chance to inhale the fragrance may know that the highest rank of the nation is passing by. You will be brothers to the princes and second only to the great king himself."

Ted and Stanley looked at one another with chagrin.

"I am glad we did not tell Chunga to cook them," the former said. "It certainly would have queered us for good."

The contents of the other packages were less surprising. They consisted of a number of bowls and goblets of beaten silver for their table; blankets of many colors; mantles gorgeously adorned with gold and silver thread; and baskets of guavas, artichokes, and numerous other kinds of fruits and vegetables. Also, two stone jars of sparkling chicha.

The two were almost overcome by this display of the Inca's generosity and show of friendliness.

"Why should he send us all these things?" Ted inquired, examining a particularly beautiful cloak completely covered with the figures of animals worked in heavy, twisted threads of gold. "He does not know who we are, nor our real reason for coming here. If he did he probably would not be so glad to see us."

"The Incas were always generous, and this is merely a way of showing hospitality and good-will," Stanley explained. "You will remember reading how Atahualpa sent rich gifts to Pizarro and his followers. And what did the Spaniards do but rob and destroy

him? It is a wonder that they are so good to us, in view of these facts; but we are going to show them that there are honorable white men in the world, and that their kindness has not been wasted. The question though is, what are we going to do with these things?"

"We can use the food on the way. Why not have them pack up the other articles again? We cannot wear the clothing. Our own clothes are clean now and look fairly good, so I am in favor of wearing them when we visit the Inca."

"Yes, I think we would make a better impression if we did. If we put on their outfits we would look too much like one of them."

The sun did not rise early in the hidden valley. By the time the brilliant disk appeared above the clouds of yellowish vapor that obscured the mountain-tops, it was after nine o'clock. This ominous-looking mist was the cause of much speculation on the part of the two Americans and once, when they had mentioned the matter to Urco, he had appeared terror-stricken, and raised both hands in token of silence. They had not broached the subject again.

True to his word, the officer, followed by the troops and servants, came at sun-up on the following morning. He saluted the visitors, inquired after their health, and hoped that everything was in readiness for the march. Stanley assured him that they but awaited his pleasure.

"Then shall we proceed at once," the officer announced. "Each hour weighs like a stone on the heart of Huayna, the Great."

He then issued a few curt commands to the column of soldiers; it parted, the forward half moving ahead, the latter going several paces to the rear. Accom-

panied by Ted, Stanley, and Moses, the officer entered the opening between the two sections.

The menials, after taking up their bags and bundles of food and other articles, marched at the end of the column; they had been joined by numerous other attendants, drafted no doubt from among the villagers, who carried the supplies for the soldiers. Each of the latter bore his bow, copper-tipped arrows, and a shield of the toughened hide of some animal.

The line moved forward at a rapid pace, heading toward the north. At intervals of about an hour it was halted for short rests. Although the soldiers were marching in "route step," they kept the formation perfectly, and showed a high order of discipline. When they conversed it was in whispers only.

In addition to his arms, each man carried a small, fibre bag attached to his belt. It was filled with coca leaves, and contained also a little gourd full of lime. When the column halted, the soldiers filled their mouths with the leaves and a few grains of the lime; this mixture was chewed throughout the day.

The effect of the drug in the coca leaves was to deaden the sensations of hunger and fatigue in the Indians, so they could march all day long without eating, or suffering greatly from the effects of the long march.

Ted and Stanley were, of course, unacquainted with the use of coca, and did not desire to form the habit, so on the first day they went hungry. By the time the halt was called for the night they were nearly famished. The next day, however, and on those following, Moses carried a good-sized package of lunch which the three ate during the midday stop.

The great highway, running close to the base of

the mountains, was used extensively by the inhabitants of the valley. There were parties of Indians going to or from the fields on the left side of the roadway. Others, apparently journeying from one settlement to another, were bowed down under the weight of packs the contents of which could not be seen. There were no beasts of burden on the road; men were taking their place. But herds of llamas were visible on some of the higher slopes.

In one place a large number of laborers was engaged in repairing the terraces above the highway, a section of them having been carried away by a recent landslide. It was there that Ted and Stanley began to understand what a vast amount of labor was required to build and keep in repair these narrow shelves in order that they might be cultivated to help provide sufficient food for the dwellers in the isolated valley.

First it was necessary to build a wall of stones on the abrupt face of the slope for the foundation. Each stone had to be hewn to the shape of a wedge so that it would fit on the slanting surface of the mountain-side without danger of its sliding down under normal conditions. No cement or mortar was used. The other blocks were accurately fitted on this firm base. When the wall was completed, the Indians filled in the triangular pockets thus created with pebbles and small stones to within two feet of the top; the remaining space was then filled in with fertile earth brought in baskets from the valley below. As all the material had to be carried on the backs of the Indians, the amount of work required to produce a single square yard of tillable soil was frightful to contemplate.

"It's a wonder they do not rebel at having to work so hard," Ted commented as they watched the horde

of toilers. "What do they get in return, I should like to know!"

"Their living, of course," Stanley replied. "They are satisfied because they don't know anything else. We would not be happy because we are used to different standards and comforts than they, but as they have never seen or heard of any other mode of life, they are contented to work for the mere privilege of living."

"Who owns the land?" Ted ventured to ask the officer who strode by their side.

"The Inca, our Great King," the latter replied promptly. "The earth, the water, and the sky; the birds of the air and the animals of the mountains; and we, his humble subjects; all are his by right of divine inheritance. Through his mercy and benevolence, two-thirds of the land is divided equally among his people each year; the other third is reserved for his personal use. Each man and woman is required to work a certain number of days on the king's land in payment for the right to cultivate his own allotment. This is a most wise regulation. Every one works, for the nation as well as for himself. There are no idlers. There is no poverty, and there is no wealth except that of the noble sovereign's."

"Does the king need one-third of the products of the whole valley for his personal use?" Ted asked in surprise.

"The maintenance of the court is costly in food and clothing. But why should we speak of that when everything is his? Rather should we be grateful that he does not take *all* as he well might do. Yet, such is his greatness of heart that much of the tribute is set aside in magazines distributed throughout the length

and breadth of his kingdom for use in case of misfortune. Many are the ill and the aged who subsist on his bounty. And often has his generosity saved the nation in time of drouth and famine."

"They seem to have the same old idea about the Inca that they had five hundred years ago," Stanley said to Ted. "He is everything to them. They never stop to think that if he permitted them all to starve to death there would be no one left to work for him, or to pay him tribute. He is smart enough to give them just enough to get along on and take all the rest for himself. If any one got rich, he would also be powerful, and that might endanger his position. He keeps the people in ignorance for the same reason. Still, as I said before, they are satisfied because they don't know any better."

The level floor of the valley was laid out in irregular fields covered with a cloak of variegated green vegetation—the different shades representing the several kinds of crops. Irrigation ditches and canals brought a bountiful supply of water from some distant, invisible reservoir.

The climate was warm and balmy. Taken as a whole, it was a most delightful spot in which to live.

There were no villages in the valley. The fertile ground was far too valuable to be taken up with buildings; it was needed to produce food, the one great problem in the valley, and every available spot was intensely cultivated. The groups of dwellings in which the inhabitants lived were situated on eminences, and rocky plots that could not be used for any other purpose.

The nightly stops of the column wending its way toward the Patallacta were made at large, stone bar-

racks or garrison posts that had been built at regular intervals along the roadside. Here the entire party found ample accommodations. The soldiers slept in long, low rooms, each of which held upward of twenty-five men. Separate apartments, comfortably furnished, had been provided for the officers, and the best of them were always assigned to Ted and Stanley.

On the morning of the fourth day they came in sight of the City on the Hill which was the abode, at least for the present, of the Inca. The two Americans gazed in awe at the towering mass of rock rising from the floor of the valley to a height of several hundreds of feet, and crowned with a city of large size. That much could be seen from a distance.

It was there that the great king, supreme lord of the valley and all it contained, was awaiting them. There they should see him in all his magnificence, surrounded by the dazzling splendor of his court. How would he receive them, the first white men who had succeeded in finding their way into the hidden and sacred retreat? Would he welcome them because of the tidings they brought of Yupanqui, his brother, or would he resent their intrusion into his secret domain? It was even possible that he would suspect them of having had a hand in the death of his unfortunate brother. What then? Never before had Ted and Stanley so fully realized how utterly alone and how helpless they were. They were absolutely at the mercy of an Indian despot who oppressed his own people. What had they, strangers and members of the hated white race, to expect at his hands?

"I doubt if we should have been so eager to get into this place if we had thought of all these things before," said Ted, trying hard to suppress his true feelings.

"I am afraid we are in deeper water than we anticipated."

"And being in it, we can only do one of two things——"

"I know. Sink or swim. The thing that worries me now is the folks at home. We should have considered their feelings more, and not let our enthusiasm run away with us."

"Too late now. We simply have to put on a bold front and make the best of it," said Stanley. Then seeing that Moses, who had overheard the conversation, was trembling with fright, he continued in a lighter tone. "Cheer up though; we have been looking at the dark side of the matter. Perhaps the king is a good, old scout, and will be glad to see us. We can entertain him by telling him a lot of things about the world that will be wonderful to him."

The conversation became more cheerful and before long they had, for the moment, forgotten some of their misgivings.

That night they camped at the base of the hill on which the city stood. Ted and Stanley found sleep impossible until well into the night, and they were awake again early the next morning. Urco, however, was up before them, as they discovered upon dressing. He had never failed to see to it that their clothing was liberally sprinkled with the powder made of the dried ducks, but on this morning he had been unusually lavish with the sacred perfume.

"Phew! it smells to the sky," Ted said, giving his shirt a violent shake. "The first chance I get at that package of mummy-dust it is going to be scattered to the four winds."

Unfortunately, Moses overheard this remark. The

day was coming when Ted would heartily regret having made it.

The ascent of the hill was made over a gently winding road that completely encircled the mound. The top was flat and of greater size than they had imagined; it was entirely covered with the low, stone houses of the city which, while clean in appearance, gave no evidence of wealth or ornamentation.

The column moved rapidly down one of the streets. There were no signs of life; apparently the place was deserted. But upon reaching the centre of the city they came to a triangular building of immense proportions surrounding an open plot or plaza to which entrance was gained through a wide gateway on each of the three sides; the place was filled with a large throng of Indians.

The officer halted the soldiers outside the walls, and sent a messenger to announce the arrival of the party. In a few minutes he returned and bade them enter. Then the officer removed his sandals, and after tying them together placed them on his left shoulder, and beckoned the strangers to accompany him. With wildly pounding hearts, Ted and Stanley, followed by Moses, obeyed.

"Keep your wits about you," Stanley whispered, "and try to appear at ease. This is the most critical moment of our lives, and we *must* make a good showing."

The assembled host of Indians parted to permit the little party to pass to the centre of the court. Ted and Stanley walked as in a dream through a lane between the gorgeously dressed personages. An array of brilliant colors flashed past on each side of them, but with heads erect, they kept their eyes straight to the front, looking for the Inca.

They had not far to go. The official suddenly stopped before a canopied litter of rough wood that stood on a platform raised several feet above the ground. Prostrating himself on the ground in most abject humiliation, he said in a low voice: "Revered father, the strangers are here."

On a heap of cushions that covered the floor of the litter reclined the form of a man, completely enshrouded in the folds of a black mantle made of the skins of bats. Only his head was visible, surrounded by the *borla*, or crimson fringe that hung down to the eyes—the sovereign's badge of authority. Two slender feathers shining with a yellow iridescence surmounted the front of the royal diadem.

The man's face was of a light shade of brown, pleasing in expression, and with regular features, but showed traces of age. His eyes were closed. It was Huayna Capac, the great king.

"Greetings, men from the outer world," he said in an even, musical voice, without raising his eyes. "You bear tidings of Yupanqui, my beloved brother? These many days has his spirit hovered near me; my heart is heavy, for he is dead."

Ted and Stanley were astonished at these words. Was it true that the Inca had had some premonition of his brother's death, or had he merely taken it for granted upon receipt of the ring that had secured their admission to the valley.

"Tell me," continued the king, "for my soul is troubled. How came he by his death? Keep nothing from me."

In faltering voice, Stanley began to relate the story of how they had found Yupanqui in the lone hut; of Tacama's attempt on his life; and of how the dying

man had given them the ring with the request that they take it to his brother, the king who still ruled in the hidden valley, and tell him all that had occurred. He even told what they had seen and heard in La Vega, and how the inhabitants had removed the body to the high mountains for burial.

As the story proceeded, Stanley gained in self-confidence until toward the end he was even eloquent. The king listened without a flicker of emotion.

"You have come a great distance, and through many perils," he said wearily when Stanley had finished. "And simply to tell me this? But hold; this question need you not answer, for only too well do I know the heartless desires of your race. At last the birthplace of the Incas and the pathetic remnant of my once powerful nation have become known to you. These many centuries has the secret been well guarded. But, did my wisdom not tell me that one day the sons of the men who laid waste the happy and contented lands of my forefathers must enter here also?"

"We are men of honor," Ted protested with spirit, "and are not sons of the men who despoiled your kingdom and your people. They came from across the sea. Our country lies to the north of yours, and is on the same side of the water. Raise your eyes, I beg of you, great king, and look at us. Can you not see that we are honorable?"

The Inca's voice was filled with sadness as he replied.

"That, alas, I cannot do, for a pall of the blackness of night has fallen upon my eyes. The tears that I have shed over the misfortunes of my wronged people, have left them cold and sightless."

They looked in pity and amazement as the Inca

raised his heavy lids. His eyes, though large, were dull and stared vacantly into the distance. He was indeed blind.

"Would that my ears too were dumb and senseless," continued the unhappy monarch. "For then could I no longer hear the tales of suffering and woe."

"Oh! I am sorry," Ted said in sympathy. "I did not know. How I wish we were doctors and could restore your sight."

In a moment the Inca recovered his composure. He rose to his feet. As he did so, the multitude fell upon their knees. His large, unseeing eyes stared straight at Ted and Stanley and seemed to bore into their very souls.

"You have come to spy on me, in the hope of finding the hidden treasure of my forefathers," he said, pointing an accusing finger at them, his voice rising in anger. "Would that I dared believe your only reason was to tell me of the manner of my poor brother's death. But that is impossible; for would you, strangers from the outer world, face the perils of the long journey without hope of rich reward? What was he, or what am I to you that you should endure these hazards for our sake?"

With sinking hearts, the two realized that the Inca's words were true. They could not deny it, but they had never for a moment thought of taking anything that was still in the possession of its rightful owners. They had come to search for the hidden and forgotten gold that every one knew must exist in some unknown spot.

"We have assured you, great king, that we are honorable men," Stanley said, tense with emotion. "And it has never been our desire to take anything

to which we are not entitled. Any reward that you may care to give us for coming to you, we shall accept. But not one other thing that belongs to you or yours shall we ever touch."

The Inca smiled in irony. "It is well," he said, sinking back on his cushions. "I shall reward you. The gold you crave and for which you risked everything—and lost—shall be yours. I will shower you with such great quantities that its brightness will dazzle and bewilder you. Yet shall you soon learn, as I have, that gold is a curse. For what is that cold, heartless metal compared to the joys of life? Is there enough gold in all the world to pay for lifelong imprisonment? For the unending separation from home, parents, and friends? For the parting with all life's hopes and ambitions?"

"No! Those things are beyond price," Ted said hastily and fearfully. A great light was beginning to dawn upon him, and with it his blood seemed to freeze.

"Still, all of them have you bartered for the hope of obtaining riches. Men from a far-off land, you may be honorable, and you may know many things, but avarice has overcome your wisdom."

"Surely," Stanley began fearfully, "surely, you do not mean to say that we shall be detained here as prisoners?"

"Prisoners? No! I shall exalt you to the rank of princes. I shall shower you with wealth untold. My mandate has already gone forth that against you no man may raise his hand or voice under pain of death. Everything shall be done to ease your sorrow, but here must you remain nevertheless. Your presence shall add to the magnificence of my court——"

"It's an outrage," Stanley protested hotly, forgetting that he was speaking to a monarch whose power was without limit. "Is that the gratitude and the hospitality of a king?"

But the Inca showed no resentment.

"There is no outlet from the valley," he said.

"Then how did Yupanqui, your brother, get out?" Stanley insisted.

"Once each ten years, the veil of poisonous vapors that enshrouds the encircling wall of mountains, rises in one isolated spot known to me and my trusted emissaries. Even though there were an escape, still should I hold you. For, would not the news of your discovery reach the ears of others less honorable than you who would come to rob and destroy me? Here must you spend your lives, in ease and in luxury; but the bright sunlight will not gladden you, and the silence of the long nights will not refresh, but depress you. Your thoughts will be far away with those whom you shall never again see. You have gamed rashly; you have won the gold you desired but—you have given your lives in return for it."

With a wave of his hand the Inca indicated that the interview was ended.

CHAPTER XVII

PRISONERS IN THE VALLEY. THE JOURNEY TO THE PLACE OF GOLD

THE interview with the Inca left Ted and Stanley dazed and filled with horror. It was some little time before the full meaning of his words came to them; and with it, their disappointment and apprehension increased.

Was it possible that he intended to hold them prisoners in the hidden valley the remainder of their lives? Raised to the rank of princes and surrounded as they would be by all the splendor and luxury of a barbarous people, what would all these things amount to compared to the awful price the despot exacted? Their doom seemed certain.

But hold! Had not the Inca said that once each ten years the veil of poisonous vapors that formed an impenetrable barrier around the valley lifted in one isolated spot known only to himself and his trusted envoys? That explained the presence of the choking, sulphurous odor they had first encountered that day they had shot the deer, weeks ago; and the yellowish haze that obscured the mountain-tops far as they could see; also, the fact that Yupanqui had been able to leave the valley at stated and regular intervals. Perhaps in ten years they could win the good-will of the Inca, or of his successor as he was already an old and infirm man, and he would permit them to depart after the long, involuntary exile. But, ten years—think

of all the things that could happen in the outer world during that length of time! No! they must find some way of escaping before then.

Then there was this side of the matter. They were absolutely at the king's mercy. It would have been as easy for him to have done away with them at once as to offer them the princely position, and his unending hospitality even though it was of an enforced nature. Was he not therefore good and generous? Or, did he merely want to prolong their anguish and suffering?

As soon as the monarch had ended the interview, attendants had raised the litter to their shoulders and had borne it into one of the apartments opening into the square.

Urco, under direction of the officer who had been in charge of the soldiers who served as an escort during the journey to the Patallacta, had shown the Americans to comfortable quarters on the opposite side of the plaza.

For a period of ten days they saw nothing of the Inca. He had retired to mourn the death of his brother, and all the court joined him in manifestations of sorrow.

Each day the nobles and the members of the royal household came to renew their expressions of sorrow. They had not changed the nature of their garb—the black robe being reserved for the Inca only—but dressed as they were in gorgeous robes sparkling with gold and jewels, the two Americans noted that not one of them entered into the presence of the king without first removing his sandals, and placing a burden upon his shoulders.

"Why do they do that?" Ted asked Urco one day

after he had seen an unusually brilliant party enter the royal habitation.

"In token of homage and humility," Urco promptly replied.

"But is the Inca really such a great king? Does everybody honestly respect him that much, or are they compelled to do that?"

"Who dares doubt it!" Urco returned with flashing eyes. "The Inca is a Child of the Sun, a god, and all other men are as flecks of dust compared to him. The moon and the sun and the stars are placed at an immeasurable distance above the earth; yet the space between the sacred person of the Inca and the greatest of his subjects is infinitely vaster."

"But you forget that this valley is a small place compared to the rest of the world. There are other great men whom you have never heard about, and powerful kings too——"

"Still is the Inca so far above them all that in his presence they would wither and die, but for his greatness of heart and pity for all of us who are not even worthy to be his most abject slaves."

"Better not get into an argument," Stanley interrupted. "You can easily see how solid the Inca is with his people. We are in a bad enough fix already under the most favorable circumstances. I hate to think of all the things they could do to us if we get on the wrong side of them."

"I was only trying to find out their real opinion of him. From what we have seen of the terrace builders and menials, I thought perhaps there might be some discontent; and we could perhaps find some one to sympathize with us to the extent of helping us get out," Ted protested.

"Well, you know now. It is the same as it was when the first Spaniards came over. The Inca is the whole show. The most abused of his subjects would consider it an honor to die for him."

"But we have to find a way to get out of here. How can we ever do it without the help of some one who knows the place? By drawing them out in conversation or argument they might unknowingly give us information that would be invaluable to us."

"That is all right; but it might be just as well not to question the position of the Inca," Stanley advised. "How to get out of here is the one big problem ahead of us. Getting in was hard enough, but getting out will be harder."

Moses, who had been strangely silent during the past two weeks, sat in a corner of the room, the picture of misery and despair. Seeing this, Ted tried to cheer him up.

"Can't you think of a plan?" he asked, but the negro only gave a sigh of hopelessness.

"Feeling like that will not help matters," Ted continued. "We have to keep our eyes and ears open and our heads busy. But above all don't do anything that will get us in wrong with the people. Now, it's up to you to help, Moses."

The negro brightened up immediately. The fact that he had been asked for help made him feel of some importance.

"Cain't we make bombs an' blow 'em all up?" he asked. "Jest like we done to the Macacos?"

"There are too many here. And besides, we didn't blow up anybody—just scared them."

"Then cain't we blow a hole through the mountains an' git out?"

"That would take tons of dynamite, and where would we get it? Think the matter over first, then your suggestion will be worth while."

Moses thought hard for a few minutes.

"I got it now," he shouted gleefully. "Yo' bin tellin' me 'bout airplanes an' flyin'. Le's make a airplane an' fly out."

"That is better," Stanley encouraged, "but still it is out of the question. We cannot make an airplane for the simple reasons that we haven't the materials and do not know how."

"If we had the stuff to work with we could rig up a wireless outfit and send out S. O. S. calls," Ted suggested. "I could make it all right but, of course, again we have nothing to work with."

"I am afraid we are all too eager to do impossible things," Stanley admonished. "Let's do some real thinking. It may take days and even weeks before the right idea comes to us, but come it will, I feel sure."

Then, after a short time, as no one spoke, he continued.

"There is something funny about our position, even if it is desperate. To get panicky is the last thing we want to do. We just got here, you might say; so let's take it easy for the present and see and learn all we can. So far we know very little about the valley and the people, and nothing at all about the treasure we came to find. The king said he will make us princes, and shower us with gold. And, thinking that there is no danger of our escape, he will probably keep his word. He thinks his secret will be safe, so no doubt he will go to the limit in showing off his riches to us. We will take things as they come and seem not to mind. But all the time our minds will be busy and when the

proper moment comes we can spring our surprise, whatever it may be."

"You certainly are a life-saver," Ted said gratefully. "So far we have not found out what we started to learn. Only by staying here can we hope to accomplish our purpose. Therefore, the only thing to do is to look at the bright side and 'saw wood' for a while."

On the eleventh day after the interview, Urco brought the tidings that the Inca and his court would start for the *Coricancha* (Place of Gold) on the following morning.

The City on the Hill was in a state of bustle and excitement. Everywhere preparations were under way for the journey that would take the greater part of two weeks, or twenty days according to the Incan method of reckoning time. Heralds were despatched to apprise the inhabitants along the route of the intended passing of the Inca in order that they might prepare for his coming.

That same afternoon one of the personal attendants of the king notified Ted and Stanley that the sovereign expected them to dine with him that night; and Urco, versed in the etiquette of the court, started them to the royal quarters a full hour before sundown.

They found the aged ruler in one of the small inner courts of his apartment—a garden of flowers and sparkling fountains. His appearance had changed. Instead of the black robe of mourning, he was clothed in a white robe of silky texture, bordered with jewels and precious metals. A chain of emeralds of enormous size, flashing a velvety green fire, hung about his neck; other stones of the same kind but of a larger size dangled from his ears, while still others sparkled on his fingers. A plate of hammered gold, in the form of a condor with out-

stretched wings, entirely covered his breast. As before, the *borla* or crimson fringe encircled his forehead.

His manner too had changed. He greeted his guests almost joyously.

"Yupanqui is dead," he said as they entered, "and I have mourned the loss of a beloved brother. But now must I be glad, for he has entered into the kingdom of his father, the Sun, and he is happy. For, should we not rejoice in the happiness of those who are dear to us, even if their gladness means a loss to us? Tell me, men from a far-off land, of your country, of your countrymen, and of your king."

At first Ted and Stanley were reluctant to talk, but after much questioning and encouragement, they entered into the spirit of the occasion, and told the Inca of the United States and its form of government; of the schools and the religious freedom, and finally of their own homes. He seemed greatly interested, and asked many questions that showed him to be a man of unusual intelligence.

In the meantime, the food was served by a number of attendants that moved to and fro as noiselessly as shadows.

The Americans sat on stools placed on each side of a wide stone table built beneath a bower of scarlet trumpet-flowers. At the head sat the Inca, on a high stool; his end of the table was also raised fully two feet above the other part. All the dishes used by the ruler were of gold; those set before Ted and Stanley were of silver. Knives or forks there were none, so the food was eaten with the fingers, and the hands were washed occasionally in basins of water provided for that purpose.

There were platters heaped with roast doves and

partridges; a great variety of vegetables, and fruits of several kinds. Also, corn bread, and cakes sweetened with honey.

At the conclusion of the meal an attendant brought a huge golden goblet, and placed it before the king. Taking it in his hands, the latter smiled, a little grimly it seemed, and said: "For the health and long life of the men from the far-off country."

Then he took a long draught, after which he passed the goblet to Stanley.

"To the king," the latter said simply, rising and touching the cup to his lips.

Ted was next. "To our generous host, the Inca," he said.

Neither of the two had actually drunk any of the chicha contained in the shining vessel; but the Inca, being blind, had not seen, and was not offended.

"I shall send for you again, often," the monarch said as they were taking their leave. "You talk like learned men, and the tales of your country amuse and interest me. Now must we to rest, for on the morrow begins the long journey to the Coricancha. There shall you see that which the eyes of no other white men have ever beheld. Also, there will I make good my promise to you. You shall learn that the word of the Inca is sacred."

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The procession that wended its way down the sides of the mound on which stood the low edifices of the Patallacta, must have been nearly a mile long.

Preparations for the journey had gone on throughout the night, and everything was in readiness by sun-up; but on account of a whim of the Inca's the start had been delayed until almost noon.

An army of servants headed the line of march. Theirs was the duty to sweep the highway clean of dust and pebbles. Following them came a numerous body of soldiery marching in columns of twos and armed with bows, arrows, lances, and bucklers. Immediately preceding the Inca were a score of youths bearing baskets of flowers with which to strew the road.

The monarch rode in a curtained litter or sedan of burnished gold, elegantly wrought, and carried on the shoulders of eight of the highest nobles. The members of his household, officers, and others of the court followed, keeping no given formation but walking in groups or parties as suited their fancy; Ted and Stanley, accompanied by Moses, journeyed with them. Attendants carrying the luggage brought up the rear.

The line moved very slowly. Evidently the heralds sent out in advance had done their duty well, for the countryside was lined with people.

Short halts were made at given intervals, but the litter bearing the Inca was never permitted to touch the earth; it was transferred from the shoulders of one set of bearers to those of another with as little swaying or motion as possible. The nobles prided themselves in being thus chosen to serve their king, even though, as Urco had said, if one of them chanced to trip and fall while carrying the precious burden the punishment for the mishap was instant death.

The great caravan occupied no more than one half of the day in travel. Stops for the night were made at regular posts distributed along the line of march. These stations provided ample quarters for the entire assembly, and were found stocked with an abundant supply of provisions such as corn, potatoes, beans,

and coca-leaves. More delicate food for the king and his party was provided by the inhabitants living nearest each stopping place.

A short stop was also made at each of the villages, of which there were many. Ted and Stanley were constantly surprised at the vast number of Indians living in the valley. Only by cultivating in the most intense manner every available foot of ground, as well as the terraces that stretched in an endless sort of stairway up the steep slopes, was it possible that the limited area of the valley could support such an enormous population.

When the procession halted the Inca raised the curtain of his litter, and showed himself to his eager subjects. Then the valley resounded with the acclamations of the throngs as they invoked blessings on his head, chanted his praise and recited his deeds of prowess and acts of wisdom.

When the tumult died down the monarch received in audience those of his chiefs who came to him for advice; and if any of the people, no matter how lowly, had suffered an injustice or grievance at the hands of one of the tribunals, he had the privilege of laying the matter before the Inca. The latter listened patiently and gave decisions without the slightest hesitation. His every word and gesture portrayed that he was accustomed to rule, and no one dared question his authority or wisdom. If one of his representatives had been guilty of oppression, or had interpreted the laws improperly, he was condemned to suffer the penalty unjustly imposed on the one who complained.

As they proceeded steadily southward, the valley grew constantly narrower. Now the mountains on the far side could be distinguished more clearly, their

outlines growing sharper and sharper. The yellow haze that obscured their summits stretched in an unbroken line as far as the eye could see. At night the sky was tinted with a faint, rosy glow—the reflection of the eternal fires smouldering within the craters of the chain of volcanoes that formed a cordon around the hidden valley, and accounted for the survival of this remnant of the ancient people undiscovered in their secure retreat.

“Prospects are not very encouraging,” Stanley said one night looking at the glaring, unbroken line of red. “No wonder no one ever succeeded in getting in here before.”

“Still,” Ted responded, “we have to find a way out, somehow. Have you thought of a plan yet?”

“Lots of them, but not one is any good.”

“Same here. But there must be a way.”

“All we can do is to keep on thinking. We shall never admit that we are beaten, and some day the way to escape will loom up before us suddenly.”

“Perhaps the Inca will relent and send us out,” Ted suggested hopefully.

“Never! Because, as he said, even though he trusts us, others would find out about our discovery. And that would mean the end of the hidden valley. A way would be found to get in here, and out again as well. No wonder he distrusts white men after what the Spaniards did.”

The third night out from the Patallacta two aged men with flowing, white hair, and wearing huge white mantles with a brown border, came to the quarters occupied by Stanley and Ted.

“We are the *amautas*” (meaning teachers or wise men), one said respectfully by way of introduction,

"sent by the great king, to teach and instruct you. Soon you will be made princes through the courtesy of the divine Huayna, the Great. It is necessary therefore, that you first become acquainted with the history and science of the nation conferring this distinction upon you, in order that you may worthily fill the exalted position that will be yours."

"We shall be glad to place ourselves in your hands," Stanley said gravely; then to Ted, "This is luck. Now we shall learn the truth about the whole matter. When we get out we can write a History of the Incas that will be authentic, and will settle all those points about which rival scientists and historians have been quibbling all these years."

"First must we assure you that this knowledge will be imparted to you only because you will remain here the rest of your lives," said the aged speaker. "Our secret will, therefore, be safe with you."

He then drew from under the folds of his mantle a heavy cord about two feet long; from it was suspended a fringe of fine threads of various colors. The latter had numerous knots tied in them. This was the *quipus* or record book, as the Americans learned later. The different colors represented different objects; thus, yellow meant gold; brown meant corn, etc. The kind and number of knots signified localities, numbers, and events.

"We shall give you only the most important facts now," the first of the two wise men continued. "Heed them well, for upon your arrival at the Coricancha you will be examined by the amautas of the palace, as one of the tests of which you will learn more later."

Consulting his quipus, the second wise man began to recite in a monotonous drawl: "When Manco Capac

and Mama Oello descended to the earth from their father, the Sun, it was to this valley they came. Here they founded the empire that soon spread until it occupied all the desirable parts of the entire Andean highlands, and extended even to the western sea."

"We had heard that Cuzco was the first city founded by the Incas," Ted interrupted.

"The Coricancha shone in splendor long before Cuzco was even thought of."

Then, and on succeeding nights, the wise men explained how the Incas had remained in the hidden valley until the form of government, the arts and the sciences had become firmly established, and until the population had become very numerous. Armed with their superior knowledge they had finally sallied forth through the secret pass between the seething volcanoes, and had easily succeeded in subduing the barbarous and ignorant tribes that inhabited the Andean tablelands.

Their seat of government in the outer world had been established at Cuzco, and there it remained until the time of the invasion of the bearded white men who had worked such havoc in the contented nation. When Atahualpa, supposedly last of the great kings, had been treacherously put to death by the invaders after paying a ransom in gold that almost completely filled the room in which he was held captive, the amautas had taken his young son Manco the Second, heir to the throne, and the treasure still remaining and had fled to the original stronghold of the nation. There had the dynasty continued in an unbroken succession to the present time. Communication with the tribes living outside the valley was kept up through trusted emissaries of whom Yupanqui had been one. The

nation was still united; it was but preparing and waiting for the favorable day when the attempt should be made to recover that which rightly belonged to it.

In conclusion, the wise men brought the story down to the present time.

"Upon arrival at the Coricancha," they said, "you must prepare for the great feast of the Huaraca during the celebration of which you will be admitted to the brotherhood of the princes. There will be ordeals; there will be contests in which the noble youths will vie with one another in the display of skill and courage. Upon the showing you make will depend the respect you will command thereafter."

"What kind of contests will there be?" asked Ted excitedly.

"Running, boxing, wrestling, and marksmanship."

The two could hardly suppress their excitement until the wise men had departed.

"Now is our chance," Stanley fairly shouted. "Our training in college athletics will come in handy, and we are hard as nails from all the walking. Maybe we won't show them a thing or two. I can hardly wait to get at them. We will make the noblest youths look like a bunch of dubs. They'll be so jealous they'll do anything to get us out of here—just to get rid of us; see if they don't."

"You said it," Ted agreed. "I am going to begin some special training this very evening."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE INCA'S PROMISE IS FULFILLED

THE Coricancha had been well named. It was truly a city of gold. Not even in their wildest dreams could the insatiable Spanish conquerors have had visions of the splendor and magnificence of this hidden treasure-trove.

Not that the edifices of the great city were constructed of blocks or slabs of the precious metal; they had been built of stone, in common with all the other houses that Ted and Stanley had seen in the valley. But the interiors, and the gardens—that was another story.

The city lay on a flat shelf or notch in the mountain-side, about two thousand feet above the floor of the valley. In the centre was the customary plaza on one side of which rose the great temple of the sun while on the other stood the palace of the Inca. Numerous other structures for housing the priests, chiefs, and nobles were scattered throughout the city; they were larger and more substantially built than the homes of the working class, but all, from the humblest hovel to the temple and palace, had unsightly roofs of earth and dried grass.

Of the wealth contained within the thick stone walls, and the inner courts of the noble residences and public buildings, Ted and Stanley so far had had only brief glimpses. But the day was not far distant when

they should behold the wonderful display in all its dazzling splendor.

The people were apparently contented but seemed listless and lacking in enthusiasm, which is exactly what one might expect to find in a country where individual effort was powerless to raise one from the station into which he had been born. In appearance they were not unlike their kinsmen inhabiting the bleak Andean highlands. But they differed in the manner of their dress, and both men and women wore their hair long and braided like the queue of a Chinaman.

Their faces were round or broadly oval, with dark brown skin and large black eyes. In stature they did not average much over five feet. Each one wore a coarse shirt, the color of which depended upon the profession in which the wearer was engaged; in addition, the men had knee trousers and the women short, full skirts of various colors. Folded *ponchos* or blankets of wool, gaudily dyed, were carried over the shoulders. Their feet were bare for the greater part, although some wore sandals. While at work in the fields, wide-brimmed straw hats were used as a protection against the sun.

Ted and Stanley were assigned to a house in a remote quarter of the city. They still retained the services of Urco and his five assistants, besides whom they also had Moses.

The amautas or wise men came daily to continue the course of instruction begun on the journey from the Patallacta to the Coricancha, and the two Americans were astonished at the amount of knowledge displayed by the aged teachers, who used only the colored strings or quipus to refresh their memories. In

addition to the history and science of the nation, they also discoursed at length upon the customs and etiquette of the Inca's court.

After a week of rest, the ordeals and training required to prepare them for the feast of the Huaraca started in earnest.

In place of the ease and comfort to which they had become accustomed, Ted and Stanley awoke one morning to find themselves bereft of their attendants including Moses. With them had also gone all the worldly possessions of the two Americans. The whole thing happened overnight, and had been done in such a silent and thorough manner that the two were taken completely by surprise.

Instead of their own clothing, they found a scant supply of soiled and tattered garments of the kind worn by the lowest of the menials. At first they were amused; then they grew suspicious.

"Moses," Ted called at the top of his voice. "What's the idea? Bring our things back and be in a hurry about it. It is time to get up."

There was no answer—only the sound of the echo ringing through the empty rooms.

Stanley then called for Urco, but still no one came. The house was silent and deserted.

"We have been robbed," Ted said hotly; "the whole place has been cleaned out, and everything is gone."

"But Moses, at least, must be around somewhere," Stanley protested falteringly.

"He is somewhere no doubt, but not here. I call that a fine trick. One minute the king promises us about everything he can give away, and the next his agents clean us out completely," Ted exploded.

"Don't be too hasty," Stanley cautioned. "There

may be a good reason for this, and everything may be all right in the end."

They searched the place carefully but found no trace of any of their missing possessions. The loss of the rifles was particularly hard to bear, for upon them might depend their escape from the hidden valley; but now that hope was gone.

Just then the two wise men entered the doorway. They raised their hands in token of silence.

"The period of trials has begun," one said in a voice calculated to fill his hearers with awe and reverence. "For thirty days and thirty nights you will dress and live in the manner of the lowliest in the nation. Your attire must be of the meanest; your feet shall be unshod; the bare ground will be your bed, and the frugal fare provided for you must be prepared with your own hands."

"Thirty days is a long time, but I guess we can stand it if that is the rule; but what has become of our things?" Ted said, "and where is the black man?"

"Never fear," the wise men assured them. "Everything is well cared for and will be returned to you in due time. Now must your minds be made to dwell upon one thing only, and that is the seriousness of the days to come. Nor will you pass through this trying period alone. When your limbs ache from the hardness of the ground; when your unshod feet are bruised and bleeding, and when hunger gnaws within you, remember this thing—that others are undergoing the same trials, and among them is Quizquiz, son of the Inca and heir to the throne. Thus has it been decreed by the all-wise kings, that each of those who are entitled to fill the exalted offices of state, must first, for a brief season, live the life of the poor and the

destitute in order that he may acquaint himself with their mode of life, and be inspired with mercy and sympathy for their condition."

"If the others can do it, we can," Ted said, putting on the shabby garment that covered scarcely a third of his body. "Now tell us about the athletic contests. We want to do some training so that we can make a creditable showing."

"There will be foot-races to test your speed and endurance; jumping, wrestling, boxing, and shooting. Upon the showing made by each contestant will depend the order of his rank and his reward."

"Nothing but the top-notch for us!" Ted said to Stanley. "How about it?"

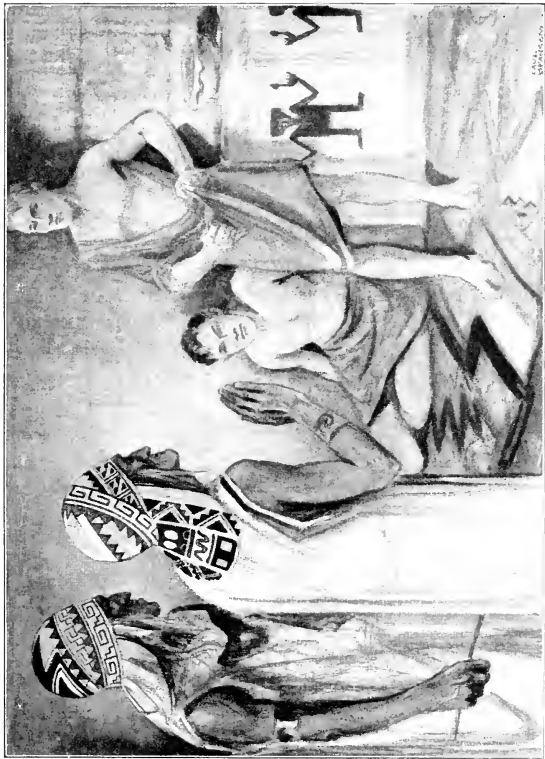
"Right. Let's get busy."

The month that followed was filled with real hardships, and with work of the most severe kind. The food provided by the wise men was poor in quality and scant in quantity, and once or twice there was nothing at all for an entire day.

"I can't see how they expect a person to train for an athletic contest and make a good showing, if they starve him to death," Ted greeted the amautas one day when they brought nothing but a small loaf of coarse cornbread and a pot of beans.

"Remember, this is a period of preparation," the old men reminded him. "You must be patient in all things. There are thousands in the valley who never knew any other mode of existence. For you it is only a matter of days, and you have the promise of a rich reward awaiting you; for them it is a lifetime of toil for the mere privilege of existing. Never forget that."

Ted and Stanley rigged up a sort of gymnasium in the open court of their dwelling. The outer edge of



"If the others can do it, we can," Ted said

the open plot was cleared for a track on which they ran daily. They gathered dry leaves and piled them in a heap on which to wrestle. They jumped, boxed, and tugged at weights consisting of stones tied to thongs; and when the day's work was over, they plunged into the fountain in the centre of the garden for a refreshing dip in the cool water. It was surprising to note the good results that quickly followed the systematic course of training, in spite of all the hardships.

"That is where we will have the advantage over the others," Ted said enthusiastically. "They know nothing about system or the scientific principles involved in making themselves fit for the event. We should have no trouble in winning all the laurels."

"Do not be too sure. We haven't seen any of the others and do not know what they are up to. All we can do is to keep on working hard and not take any chances."

The period of training was over at last, and then came the great day for the celebration of the Huaraca. Ted and Stanley were so well pleased with the progress they had made that they felt as if they would be, at least, a match for the best of the Indian youths with whom they would be obliged to compete.

The amautas called for the Americans before dawn of the appointed day, and conducted them to the plaza facing the Inca's palace. The place was already thronged with people, and they had their first view of the other contestants, five in number, who appeared to be of about their own age. All were dressed in the same mean garb, and bore evidences of the privations they had undergone during the past thirty days. In

a silent, expectant group they waited, carefully watched by the keen-eyed instructors.

By the time the sun had risen the plaza was filled to overflowing, that is, all but the space in which the athletic meet was to be held. If the nobles had appeared in gorgeous attire at the Patallacta, words would fail adequately to describe the richness of their garments on this occasion. They were clothed in tunics of fine woollen cloth dyed in brilliant colors, and bordered with a heavy fringe of gold. Their mantles blazed with golden ornaments, and heavy pendants of the same precious metal dangled from their ears. Each wore a colored turban on his head. Attendants carried umbrella-like canopies which shielded their masters from the sun, and also banners bearing the insignia of the various clans.

Ted and Stanley stood agape at the wondrous spectacle that moved and surged before their eyes like a sea of glittering colors. They were aroused from their stupor by a mighty shout that suddenly rent the air. The Inca had appeared.

On this day the multitude did not fall upon its knees upon the approach of the monarch, but after the first acclamation, stood with bowed heads until the golden litter in which he reclined had been carried to the centre of the plaza where it was deposited upon a stone platform that held it high above the crowd and within easy view of all.

This litter differed from the one in which the king had journeyed from the Patallacta in that it contained a chair or throne upon which he was seated.

A cloak made from patches of iridescent feathers taken from the throats of humming-birds was draped loosely about his shoulders, revealing his snowy tunic

that was bordered with scarlet. His arms were covered with heavy amulets of gold. Rings set with emeralds sparkled on his fingers, and the velvety green stones in the chain that encircled his neck were so large that their weight must have been oppressive.

When he moved, a thousand points of ruby, topaz, and violet light darted like tongues of flame from the gorgeous mantle, and the jewels sparkled and flashed so that the effect was dazzling to the eyes.

The canopy that covered the Inca's litter was made of chinchilla skins sewn together in such a manner that the alternate light and dark parts of the pelts joined, making a wavy, shell-like pattern.

Without rising from his throne, the Inca addressed the throng in a clear, penetrating voice. He reminded them of the meaning and the importance of the occasion; that the select youths of the nation, after undergoing the prescribed ordeals and course of training, were now ready to prove their fitness to be admitted to the high station to which their birth alone did not entitle them. He also alluded, in a few words, to the strangers, whom it was his pleasure to honor in recognition of the courage and enterprise they had displayed in reaching the hidden valley.

The games began immediately. Before they fully realized what had happened, Ted and Stanley found themselves, together with the other contestants, in the space reserved for the events.

Boxing came first. No gloves were used and the affair immediately developed into a free-for-all fight in which the youths punched and mauled one another unmercifully. For a moment, the two Americans stood and looked on in surprise. But Ted was suddenly awakened by a vicious jab that nearly knocked

the breath out of his body. He turned quickly and faced the Indian who had struck the blow; his right fist shot out, and caught the youth under the chin, sending him sprawling to the ground. Then both Ted and Stanley made a rush for the crowd, but the amautas who acted as judges halted the fight and proclaimed a period of rest. They seemed greatly concerned over the condition of the contestant who had been knocked out by Ted, but as he had promptly recovered his feet and had started to re-enter the fight, Ted felt no uneasiness over his action. He noticed, however, that the color of his rival was of a lighter shade than the others, and also that he was of better appearance.

"That was some wallop he gave you," Stanley remarked during the interval of rest. "I think I shall call him the 'slugger.'"

"What do you think of the one I gave him?" Ted asked quickly.

"That was the real thing. You knocked him cold. I am sorry they called the fun just as we were getting interested."

After the boxing came the jumping. One of the judges drew a line on the ground, and placed the contestants along it at regular intervals.

"Standing jumps," Ted whispered. "I thought we were in for at least a little excitement, but it looks as if this is going to be a tame affair all the way through."

"Never mind," Stanley replied. "The day is young yet. We might have a surprise coming to us before the thing is over."

At the word of command the youths began to jump, and to the surprise and chagrin of the Americans they

found that in this sport the Indians were excellent. Their short stature, however, was a serious handicap.

In contrast to the manner in which the boxing had been conducted, the judges began rapidly to eliminate the poorer performers, showing unquestioned fairness in their decisions. As one was sent back from the line, those remaining tried again while the crowd roared its approval. Unfortunately, Ted had slipped early in the game and had been ruled out promptly. Only Stanley and one other remained; the latter was the "slugger."

As the two stepped up to the line, Stanley was surprised to hear the amautas halt the contest without a word of comment or explanation. Stanley looked to the crowd of spectators; they were silent and grave.

"What do you think of that?" he asked in surprise. "Don't they want any one to win?"

"I cannot understand it either," Ted replied. "Just when things get exciting, they stop them."

"That may be their idea of sport, but I cannot say that I am very enthusiastic over it. It does not give a fellow a chance."

It had been agreed beforehand, that as Ted and Stanley were unacquainted with the use of the bow and arrow, they were to be permitted to show their marksmanship with their rifles. The others, of course, were to use the weapon with which they were familiar. The result was that the Indians gave a splendid exhibition of their skill, at a range of about fifty paces. At that distance the marksmen succeeded in sending their arrows through small potatoes suspended on strings and used as targets. For a while bows twanged and arrows snarled and whined through the air while the onlookers cheered frantically.

On account of the great penetrating power of the bullets fired from the rifles, two targets for the use of the Americans had been rigged up on high poles. This prevented the possibility of hitting some one beyond the confines of the range, as the bullets could speed away harmlessly above the city.

When the others had finished, Stanley took careful aim and pulled the trigger. At the crack of the rifle, the potato dropped off the pole. The Indians stared wide-eyed, and one of the contestants, stricken with terror, broke from the group and ran. Surely, the sharp report of the rifle must have been a new phenomenon in the hidden valley, and Ted and Stanley were surprised that more of the Indians did not show signs of fright. But they stood their ground stolidly until the firing ceased.

At last preparations were made for the races. The crowd went wild with enthusiasm as the contestants took their places on the starting line.

"Now is our chance to show them the real thing," Ted whispered as he bent low for the get-away. "Somebody will have to be the winner. They can't stop the race half-way."

All the others were standing at the line.

"It's a shame to do it," Stanley returned. "They don't even know how to start."

Just then one of the judges clapped his hands and the racers darted away, while the crowd roared.

The course was short, probably less than one hundred yards. Looking neither to right nor left, Ted and Stanley sped along, unreeling the distance at a great pace until the line that marked the finish flashed past beneath their feet. Stanley came in first, with Ted following close at his heels; their nearest competitor

was fully eight yards behind, and as he crossed the line and swerved aside, Ted saw with a gleam of exultation that it was the slugger.

What neither he nor Stanley noticed, however, in the heat of the excitement, was that the applause had died down suddenly when the outcome of the race was apparent to the onlookers. If they had, the truth of the situation might have dawned upon them at last.

The contestants were now brought before the Inca, who had been kept informed of everything that had taken place, by the nobles who surrounded him.

In the royal presence, one of the oldest of the amautas asked each of the youths a number of questions that were supposed to cover the most important points of their education and training. All answered readily and to the satisfaction of their examiner.

The Inca now arose, and throwing back his shimmering mantle, extended his hands toward the line of eager youths and addressed them in a steady, pleasing voice.

"Yours, my sons, is the honor to-day to be received into the ranks of the nobility of the nation," he said. "Your birth and your training, and the showing you have just completed, entitle you to this lofty station. The ordeals and the tests have been severe, but also, they have proven your worth and your valor. Therefore, I, Huayna Capac, extend my hand in greeting and invest you with the new honors."

Members of the royal household now brought out tunics of snowy cloth and, kneeling, held them up for the king's blessing. Then they stripped the candidates of their shabby attire, bathed them, and clothed them in the new garments they were henceforth to wear.

Next they brought wreaths of flowers interwoven with sprigs of evergreen. The flowers, the Inca explained, represented the virtues of life, such as mercy, charity, and unselfishness; and the evergreen signified that these noble qualities should endure forever.

Finally, the youths passed in single file before the Inca, and he placed a chain of emeralds about the neck of each.

"I greet you and I welcome you into my household," he said in a fatherly voice in conclusion. "But take heed, lest vanity and avarice encroach upon your hearts, and lest the power of your new station blind you to your duties, responsibilities, and unswerving loyalty to your sovereign."

An attendant handed the king a small golden cage. Inserting his hand into it, the monarch drew out a fluttering humming-bird. Its throat and neck blazed with a ruby fire; its head and back flashed with the color of a topaz. For an instant he held it aloft, in plain view of every one.

"To all earthly splendor and glory there is an end; never forget that," he said sadly. Then, with a quick movement, he crushed the gorgeous bird and threw it lifeless from him.

"Even the sun sets, and the Inca must die—each at the close of his day. And so it shall be with you. But, if your work has been faithfully done, then shall the darkness of night but herald the approach of a new and more radiant day than the one that has just come to an end."

The ceremonies had been most impressive, and Ted and Stanley were strangely affected by their simple beauty. Only once before had they experienced a

similar feeling, and that was while in attendance at the "retreat" formation at one of the military posts at home. The flag was being lowered slowly from its lofty staff, the lines of men in uniform presented arms, and the band played "The Star Spangled Banner." As the national emblem neared the earth, a soldier caught it in his arms so that no portion of it might touch the ground and become soiled. That signified that the manhood of the nation stood between the flag and its degradation.

All the events of the past thirty days, and of to-day especially, had been carefully planned to impress upon the chosen youths of the Incan realm the meaning and the responsibilities of their future life.

Ted and Stanley thought of these things when it was all over—after the banquet had been served, and they had been taken to the magnificent residence they were to occupy henceforth.

Could they, after accepting all these favors, be traitors to the Inca?

They had not asked for rank, nor even the riches that were so lavishly showered upon them. All they wanted was to be permitted to return to the outer world. Would an attempt to escape from the hidden valley be an act of treachery toward the Inca? They thought not, so long as they kept their secret and thereby prevented others from despoiling the ancient kingdom.

No! whatever else happened, they would never be disloyal. They would fill their new position to the best of their ability. Upon those points they were agreed.

Yet, even before the dawn of another day they

were, unwittingly, to do that which in the eyes of the Inca and his court was an act of the grossest ingratitude and the most unpardonable offense of which mortal man could be guilty.

CHAPTER XIX

IN THE COUNCIL-CHAMBER. THE SENTENCE

DARKNESS found Ted and Stanley so exhausted from the events of the day that they lost little time in seeking the bedrooms of their new and comfortable quarters. After the privations endured during the previous thirty days, the sight of their inviting abode was a welcome one.

Before turning in for the night, however, they asked for Moses, and he was promptly returned to them. In answer to their questioning, he assured them that he had been well cared for during the long separation.

"My lan'!" the negro concluded almost reverently. "Yo' is princes now! I hope yo' is goin' to give me back my ole job though."

"Why certainly," Ted reassured him. "We accepted this prince business only because it might help us get away, and because we could not get out of it. We will look out for you just the same as we did before. And, do not forget, we expect you to let us know if you think of a scheme for escaping." Then, to Stanley: "It's lucky Moses does not speak or understand the Quichua language. We need not be afraid that he will give away any of our plans to the Indians."

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It seemed to Stanley that he had hardly closed his eyes in sleep. Surely, he could not have been in bed more than a few minutes when a disturbance in the room awakened him. For a while he listened, but all was quiet. He looked at his watch; the luminous

hands pointed to the hour of midnight. Could it be possible that he had slept four hours? And why the sudden awakening? A faint noise, like the shuffling of bare feet, caught his ears.

"Is that you, Ted?" he asked without moving. But, as no answer came, Stanley sprang from his bed and made for the direction from which the sound came. He had gone less than a dozen steps when he collided with some one in the darkness.

"Mercy, mercy," a frightened voice exclaimed in a whisper. "Have mercy and save me."

"Who are you?" Stanley demanded. "And what do you want?"

"I am Tola, nephew of the king, and I have come to you, noble prince, for protection," the frightened voice replied.

"Wait," Stanley said calmly. Then he struck a match and lighted a candle. He held the flickering light close to the face of the visitor. "Why," he exclaimed, "I have seen you before! It was in the plaza this morning, wasn't it?"

"Yes, at the celebration of the Huaraca."

"I remember perfectly now. You were one of the candidates. The firing of our guns startled you and you disappeared, but I do not blame you. I wondered what had become of you."

"Forgive me, great and glorious prince, for waking you up out of your sleep, and have pity on me. For the weakness I displayed when the strange, shining stick your brother held crashed like thunder, I am disgraced and robbed of my rank and title. But, not only that; to-morrow I must die."

"What?" Stanley asked in surprise. "Die? What for?"

"For showing fright. The king is my father's brother, but that does not matter. By his command I am doomed. I am disgraced and not worthy to be a member of his family."

"Is that the law?" Stanley asked.

"Yes. Cowardice must be punished with death. But I am not a coward. It happened so unexpectedly that I did not know what I was doing. I am not afraid to die. I only ask you to help clear my name for my father's sake."

"What does your father say? Has he no influence with his brother, the Inca?"

"He is sorely grieved and distressed, and will not even speak to me because of the shame I have brought upon his name."

"Then how can I help you, if he can do nothing for you?"

"Intercede for me with the king. He will listen to your prayer and explanation. You are a prince and as such are powerful. Take pity. See, I am kneeling at your feet——"

"Don't do that! Get up. How did you get here to-night?"

"The guards fell asleep, so I fled. No doubt my escape has been discovered, and the search for me has begun. Hide me until you can see the Inca."

"Well," said Stanley thoughtfully, "I shall be glad to help you all I can. Wait here while I go to consult my companion."

He went into the adjoining room and called Ted.

"What is the big idea?" the latter asked sleepily. "This is the first real bed I have been in in a month, and now you are waking me up at some unholy hour."

"Get up," Stanley said gravely.

"It isn't morning, is it? I just went to sleep."

"Get up, just the same as if it were morning. I have something pretty important to tell you."

Ted sat up and rubbed his eyes. Then he tossed aside the blankets and stepped to the floor.

"Do you remember the fellow who ran away when you began firing this morning?" Stanley asked.

"Yes! what about him?"

"He is in there. Woke me up sneaking into my room."

"Why did he come at this hour of the night? What does he want?"

"He has been condemned to die for showing fright or cowardice. Come in and let him tell you his story."

Together they went into the room where the cowering youth was waiting. At Ted's request he repeated his tale just as he had told it to Stanley.

"I am sorry for him," Stanley said when the wretched youth had finished talking. "And I do not see anything so bad about his action. Suppose we keep him here until we can see the Inca."

"By all means," Ted agreed. "Remember the lesson of to-day. We must be kind and merciful to others. Here is the opportunity to make good use of the influence our position gives us."

They took the youth to one of the numerous rooms of their dwelling, and bade him remain there until they should see him again. Then they hastened back to their own beds.

Ted and Stanley spent the greater part of the following morning inspecting their new domicile. It was a huge structure built of stone. The rooms were large though low. There were numerous niches in the walls, and in them stood little statues of men and

animals; also representations of the sun, moon, and stars—all made of gold or silver.

One of the rooms was filled with a store of clothing, while in another were kept the vases, cups, and plates used in the service of the table.

"The Inca has certainly kept his promise to shower us with gold," Ted said, his eyes bulging out at sight of the shelves covered with the precious objects.

Stanley's eyes too sparkled. "There must be a ton of gold right in this room," he said in an awed voice. "I did not know there was so much in one spot in the whole world, and to think that all this belongs to us. Just look at the size of these bowls—and the workmanship is perfect. They must be very old; they are priceless, and they are ours—our very own. I can hardly believe my eyes."

"Still, it is true. Remember what the amautas said when they brought us here last night? 'This dwelling and whatsoever you shall find therein has been bestowed upon you by your king, the Inca, to use and to keep. Accept it and fill with dignity and gratitude the sacred trust that now is yours.' That is plain enough, isn't it?"

"No question about it, whatever. But do you know, this whole thing does not appeal to me. Wonderful as this treasure is, think of what it cost! Think of the thousands of men who toiled day after day to extract that gold out of the mountains, and for no other reward than their bare existence! The terrace-builders we saw were a fair example of the slavery that made the collection of such a hoard as this possible. Besides this, we are subjects of the Inca now. We must wear these clothes," pointing to their white tunics. "Which, while they are nice to look at, and all that,

are not in the least to our liking or suited to us. I would rather wear my old khaki outfit any day. We are also expected to live up to our position, and heaven alone knows all that may mean. I am not ashamed to say that I am getting scared. I would be glad if we could find a way of escaping right this minute."

"You are right," Ted agreed. "We have everything a barbarous people can give us, for they are barbarians in spite of their wealth and knowledge, but at the same time, we are prisoners and we shall never be contented until we get out."

"I had forgotten all about Tola," Stanley said, suddenly remembering their midnight visitor. "We must go to the Inca at once to plead in his behalf."

"Let's have Moses take him something to eat first, and then keep him on guard at the door so that no one will discover him until after we have settled the matter," Ted suggested.

They called Moses who, wide-eyed with amazement, had been wandering aimlessly around the house. Ted instructed him as to the food and also that he was to stand guard at the door, and permit no one to enter until their return.

Then they started to the palace, which was but a short distance away. Upon reaching the door they removed their sandals and placed them on their left shoulders—the sign of homage demanded of all who ventured into the presence of the king. Heretofore they had not been required to observe this regulation; but now they were subjects of the Inca, and as such must obey the laws and customs of the empire.

Encountering no one at the entrance, they passed into the wide corridor that led directly to the inner court and garden. At sight of the latter they stopped

short. The great open space was filled with artistically arranged beds and plots of flowers, fruit-bearing shrubs, and grain—wrought in gold, silver, and other metals. Among these skilful representations of plants grew beds and clusters of living flowers and stately trees, the trunks and branches of the latter covered with clumps of brilliant orchids. The air was heavy with perfume, and from the midst of the shrubbery came the tinkle and splash of fountains that threw sprays of sparkling water high into the air.

Among the many plants made of gold and silver, the stalks of Indian corn were the most realistic. The stems and broad leaves had in some manner been oxidized to a greenish color; golden ears of grain protruded from silver husks, and fine silver threads represented the tufts of silken fibres.

“You have come to see my father?” a sullen voice broke upon them suddenly.

They had been so absorbed in gazing at the wonderful garden, that they had not noticed the approach of the youth who now stood beside them. The two turned and gasped in surprise. It was the slugger.

“Yes, if it pleases the king to receive us,” Stanley said quietly.

“My father, the Inca, will receive no one to-day, nor to-morrow; nor the day after to-morrow either,” the youth replied haughtily. “He is aged and must rest after the tiring events of yesterday.”

“All right,” Stanley said. “We did not mean to intrude, but it is upon a matter of importance that we came. We shall come again at a more favorable time.”

Without another word the youth turned and walked away.

On the way back to their own dwelling Ted looked serious and ill at ease.

"Will I ever know anything?" he said disgustedly. "I knew that the Inca's son was to be among the contestants yesterday, and the very first thing I did was to knock him down. No wonder he is surly."

"He hit you first, didn't he?"

"I know, but I could have used more tact. He can probably make it unpleasant for us if he wants to."

"That explains why they stopped all the contests as soon as they saw the Inca's son was going to lose. I see it now. The others did not try to get the best of him, but, not knowing who he was, we did."

"Well," said Ted, "I am glad we did not know it."

"It would not have made any difference if we had. We should have tried to win just as hard. If he is put out because we beat him in a fair game, he is a pretty poor sort of a chap."

When they returned they found Moses faithfully guarding the door of the room in which the fugitive was hiding.

"I went an' done it," he greeted them with a broad smile.

"Did what?" Stanley asked.

"What yo' said yo' would like to git did."

"I do not remember what that was."

"The puffume powder. I went an' emptied it in the yard."

"Thank goodness for that. Now Urco can't saturate our clothes with it any longer. It was awful. I hope no one saw you do it, though."

"No suh!" emphatically. "I look out fo' that."

"All right then. Thanks very much for getting rid of it."

The Inca steadfastly refused to see Ted and Stanley for a whole week. At the end of that time they were becoming worried over the matter of Tola's concealment.

"I am afraid we shall have to go to some one else for advice soon," Ted said one day as they were returning from a fruitless visit to the palace. "We cannot keep him hidden forever."

"No. We have kept him too long already. Suppose he should be discovered by some one! We might be accused of harboring a fugitive from justice. Of course, that is what we actually are doing; but our intentions are not to take the law into our own hands, but rather to explain a situation we can understand better than they and to ask leniency. Surely, our position ought to give us the right to do that."

The time passed slowly. In spite of the fact that the two Americans had succeeded in attaining the object of their expedition, they were far from being happy. At first the novelty of the situation appealed to them. They looked with glowing eyes upon the vast treasure that was theirs, admired it from a distance, then touched the massive objects of gold gingerly as if afraid that the whole thing was only a mirage—a deception of the imagination that would vanish as suddenly as it had come.

After that they tired of visiting the room that contained their useless wealth. They wanted to go out into the city, but custom demanded that they could not appear in public except at given times, and then only if accompanied by a guard of honor and numerous attendants. The Indians they met on the streets always uncovered their heads and bowed almost to the

ground as they passed. They disliked these signs of servility.

"We have no right to accept those acts of homage," Stanley said. "If they want to act like slaves toward their ruler, that is their own affair. But we are not real princes, and would not be if we could."

"It's against all my principles too," Ted agreed. "I thought it would be great fun, and it was for a while, but just let me be a plain American and back at home again. That is all I ask for."

"I have an idea," Stanley said suddenly. "We could be doing a lot of valuable work here while we have the opportunity. It may be impossible to take very many of our things away with us when we escape, so why not make sketches and write descriptions of them? That would keep us busy and the knowledge we gain will be appreciated by some museum when we get home."

"A great idea," Ted said enthusiastically. "Let's get at it right away. We can take photographs too, of the more interesting scenes and places. Funny we did not think of it before."

The next few days were therefore devoted to their new occupation. At first they took pictures of the Inca's palace, the temple, some of the more important streets and of groups of people. Then they began writing descriptions of the various objects in their treasure room.

One of the things that interested them greatly was a vessel of gold having a capacity of about a gallon. It was used to carry drinking-water from the fountain. In shape it was somewhat like a teakettle, but had a spout on each side. Urco showed them how, when the vessel was nearly full of water, musical sounds

would issue from the spouts; as the bearer walked along swinging his hand the water swished back and forth causing the air to whistle in and out of the two openings. If several of the servants came from the fountain together, each carrying one of the containers, a sort of music was made, like a chorus of toots and squeaks from a miniature calliope.

Some of the golden objects must have been cast in moulds, as there were exact reproductions of ears of corn, peanuts, and potatoes arranged to form raised wreaths for decorative effects. Llamas, condors, and pumas were also represented, though rudely, on some of the cups and vases.

As the days passed Ted and Stanley became more and more engrossed with their new occupation. After writing a detailed description of each object it was either sketched or carried out into the court where the bright light made it possible to secure a good photograph.

"The pictures will be indisputable proof of our story," Ted said one afternoon when he had finished developing a roll of film and was holding the strip of clear, sharp negatives up against the light. "No one would dare doubt us when we show these."

"It will be easy to take them along too," Stanley said. "All the pictures we take can be rolled up and placed into one of the tin tubes in which the films were put up; then we can seal it with a piece of adhesive tape so no moisture will get in to spoil them."

Quizquiz, son of the Inca, had entered the garden unobserved by the Americans. Turning suddenly, Stanley found him standing but a few yards away, observing them quietly.

"Pardon me," Stanley said quickly, "I did not know

you were here. You have not been waiting long, I hope?"

Quizquiz scowled. "My father, the king, awaits you at the palace," he replied haughtily. "You will come with me at once."

"Is that the king's message?" Ted retorted, not liking the superior air of the visitor.

"It is," sullenly. "Huayna Capac waits on no man."

"All right, we will go."

They took the things with which they had been working into the house, and accompanied the heir to the Inca's throne to the royal residence.

"Wait here," he said as they reached the corridor of the palace. "I will go in to announce your arrival."

Then he disappeared through one of the doors leading into the inner apartments.

Ted and Stanley waited. Minutes passed, but no one came to bid them enter.

"I thought the king was waiting for us," Ted said. "This does not look as if he is in such a very great hurry."

"We have been here nearly half an hour. I wonder if Quizquiz was telling the truth or if he is up to something."

"It will be easy enough to find out. We can go to the king's apartment and ask if he will see us. Whether or not he actually sent for us, we should lose no time in presenting Tola's case to him. The longer we hide him, the harder it will be to explain the matter."

"It is not our fault the Inca refused to see us during the last two weeks."

"Of course not, but just the same I do hope we can get to him before many more days pass."

As they reached the door of the king's quarters, the guards stood back respectfully to permit them to pass. Before entering, however, they removed their sandals in conformance with the custom.

An officer of the guard motioned to the two to follow him, and led the way straight into a spacious room with a high ceiling, that was lighted up with a large number of candles and pitch torches.

The chamber was filled with people. It seemed as if all the nobles of the city were assembled within the confines of the four stone walls.

At the far end sat the Inca, on a raised chair or throne. The *Coya* or queen sat by his side; it was the first time Ted and Stanley had seen the latter.

When directly in front of the thrones, the officer halted and bowed low.

"Revered father, they are here," he announced.

A hush fell upon the assembly. For a moment, the breathless silence pervaded the room and the two Americans felt that all eyes were turned upon them. Then the king spoke, slowly, as if weighing each word carefully.

"It is not the custom for the Inca to await the pleasure of his subjects," he said. "I, Huayna Capac, have been inconvenienced and annoyed, and the gathering has been delayed by your tardiness."

"We ask your forgiveness, Huayna Capac, if we have been at fault," Stanley said quickly, puzzled at the monarch's words. "We have been in the outer corridor a long time, waiting for permission to enter."

"Explanations are not desired," the king replied promptly. "Know you not that as princes of the nation you have been accorded the privilege of coming to your sovereign at any time without securing per-

mission from any one? I alone am king! Still, I am inclined to be lenient. You are pardoned, this one time, for the show of disrespect toward me." Then, speaking to the room in general: "Now may we proceed with matter for which I called this assembly."

One of the nobles of high rank, who had long white hair and was bent with age, slowly made his way to the foot of the throne and, after bowing, kissed both the Inca's feet. Then he turned to face the gathering.

"I speak in the name of our divine father, Huayna Capac," he began in a tremulous voice. "An unheard-of offense has been committed against the majesty of our king. In all the annals of the nation there is nothing to equal or even approach the act of disloyalty, of treachery, that has been perpetrated against his authority and unfailing wisdom."

The speaker paused for a moment; all eyes were turned upon him and no one stirred. The scene in the room was weird and unreal. From their niches in the walls the flickering candles threw a dull radiance upon the dusky, upturned faces. The pitch torches sputtered and crackled and sent up thin columns of white smoke. Gay colors, softened by the mellow light, blended harmoniously; and there was the flash of jewelled turbans and golden ornaments.

"There is a traitor in our midst," continued the aged official, raising his hand for emphasis. "And we, the nobles of the kingdom, have been called together to devise a means of detecting the one upon whose shoulders rests the guilt of this treachery, and to mete out swiftly the deserved punishment."

Again he paused. But now the sound of heavy

breathing filled the room. The suspense and indignation of the hearers was making itself felt in spite of their efforts to restrain them.

"The offense being without precedent and one not contemplated, is not covered in the statutes of penalties. It is aimed directly against the divine power of our sovereign. Therefore, as a show of united devotion to him, he has graciously commanded that we determine the mode of punishment, and this before the culprit is known in order that there may not be the guilt of prejudice or injustice upon our heads. Upon this one point, and this alone may there now be suggestions. The charge is treason against our father, the Inca. What shall the penalty be?"

The sound of animated whispering now came from all parts of the room.

"Let the punishment be death," said a sombre voice from the front of the throng. A chorus of others immediately joined in assent.

"You have heard," said the spokesman. "The punishment shall be death. If there be any to object, let them come forward and speak, now or never."

No one stirred.

"Then, upon that point we are agreed. The penalty will be death. But, in what manner shall the sentence be carried out?"

"If it pleases my father, the king, and his faithful servants here assembled," spoke a youthful voice, "let the guilty ones be sent to Uti, beyond the wall, with bread enough for a week. That would give them time to meditate upon the enormity of their offense before finally paying the justly deserved penalty of death." The speaker was Quizquiz.

"Again you have all heard," said the spokesman.

"If there be any to object, let them come forward and speak, now or never."

Not a voice was raised in protest.

Ted raised his hand to attract the chairman's attention, but Stanley quickly bade him remain silent.

"So shall it be," said the aged speaker. "The living death is the punishment upon which all present have agreed. And now, to state the exact nature of the offense, briefly and definitely. The penalty for cowardice is well known to all; no one had previously doubted its justice nor the wisdom that proclaimed it. Therefore, Tola, who to the undying shame of his father, and of those who trusted him and who believed that for him life held great promise, richly merited the sentence that was imposed upon him. Of his guilt there was no question, for was it not in the presence of the Inca himself, and of the whole court assembled that Tola showed his true self on the day of the Huaraca? And even if there had been a doubt, did he not prove his unworthy character by escaping from his guards in the hope of evading his fate? All the hiding-places in the valley have been searched. He has not been found. Therefore, we must conclude that some one is shielding him, and that one, whoever he may be, is guilty of treason, for is he not questioning the authority that pronounced the sentence? We must find Tola, and in so doing we shall discover the traitor. The duty is ours and one that we will accept with determination, for in so doing we will be showing our loyalty to Huayna Capac, our king."

Again Ted started to speak, but Stanley silenced him.

Cries of "Long live Huayna Capac" filled the room. But the Inca showed no signs of emotion of any kind,

nor did he acknowledge the acclamation of the throng. A heavy curtain was quickly drawn across the end of the room, hiding the thrones from view.

Then the assembly broke up into little groups that slowly made their way homeward. The sound of loud conversation was heard in the plaza until late into the night.

CHAPTER XX

THE FIGHT

TED and Stanley made their way home slowly from the awful council-chamber. At first neither spoke. They were too overcome, too bewildered by the proceedings of the assembly to even think clearly, much less express their thoughts in words.

"Why were you against putting up a fight at the meeting?" Ted finally asked. "We might have stopped the whole thing if we had come out and explained our position and our reasons for shielding Tola."

"Couldn't you see that we did not have a chance in the world in that crowd? Quizquiz is to blame for it. He hasn't forgotten the day of the Huaraca, and wants us out of the way. Had we admitted our part in the affair we should never have been permitted to leave the room. The mob was furious; it was seeing red," Stanley said. "We are in a terrible fix. There is no use denying that."

"It's a clumsy and unjust deal, and goes to show how treacherous they are. Why did they go to all the trouble of lying to us, and of making us princes and leading us to believe they were fair and honest if it was only for this?"

"Because it is more bitter to give up a pleasant thing that one has tasted than one that is unknown to him," Stanley said soberly. "Perhaps it was because as princes they could plan a more elaborate end for us than otherwise. But, I cannot help but believe

that the Inca himself is innocent. He may have sent Tola to us just to see what we would do, but I do not think so. No doubt Tola was sentenced as he said he was, and came to us unknown to any one else. In some manner, Quizquiz must have learned of it; it was his opportunity to get us into a compromising position, and he lost no time in making the best of it. Remember how he told us to stay outside to-night when he knew they were waiting in the hall? That was done so we would make a bad impression and gain the disfavor of the Inca and his court right to start with. And now we know too that he was lying when he told us repeatedly that his father was keeping a fast and would see no one, the many times we went to tell him about Tola. No doubt Quizquiz is congratulating himself on the success of his scheme. But whatever happens, there is one thing I should like to do first, and that is to get my hands on him."

"I feel the same way about it," Ted agreed.

"There is just one thing to do," said Stanley. "And that is to get out of here before morning. If we stay, we haven't a chance. It is too late for explanations or arguments. We have got to make a break some way or other."

"I know it," Ted admitted gloomily. "But it looks like we are trapped every way you look at it, and——"

"Well," Stanley broke in resolutely, "if it comes to the worst they will find out that we can *fight*. We must look to the rifles right away. If they force us to it, we can give such an account of ourselves that the amautas will be telling about it five hundred years from now."

When they reached their dwelling they found Urco awaiting them within the doorway. He seemed greatly

agitated and followed them to the door of Stanley's room.

"Send Moses to me at once," Stanley ordered.

"The black man is not here," Urco responded. "I am most sorry, noble masters, but I cannot send him to you."

"I don't understand. Explain what you mean."

"This morning the honorable Moses committed a grievous offense. I did not see it, so am innocent of what happened to-night. But one of the attendants saw him throw away the sacred perfume and trample it into the earth. For this insult to a holy article and to an ancient custom there is a heavy penalty. I fear you may not soon see him again."

"But it was our perfume," Stanley said quickly. "His punishment should be left to us because his offense was against us. But besides, we told him to throw it away, so Moses is not to blame for what he did. He was obeying our orders."

"Do not say that," Urco exclaimed in terror. "Already my noble masters are in trouble enough without inviting any more."

"Then you know?" Stanley asked in surprise.

"How could I help but know? They searched the house, and took him away."

"Tola?"

"Yes! My heart was heavy with sorrow and pity, but I could do nothing. The palace guards may enter where they will. None dares resist them. They seemed to know everything."

"How long since they were here?"

"Just before the close of the meeting in the palace. Alas! by this time Tola is no more."

"All right, Urco. You may go," Stanley said quietly.

"But wait, in what manner will they punish the black man? Will they take his life?"

"That I cannot say, but probably not."

"Where is he now?"

"In the storeroom. A guard stands by the door with orders to let no one see the prisoner. He may be taken away at any time."

"That is all, Urco. Good night."

But the faithful servant lingered in the doorway as if loath to take his departure.

"I am sorry," he said with sadness in his voice. "And I believe that no wrong was intended toward the great king."

"Thank you. I am glad some one understands."

Urco bowed low, then went slowly away.

"They will probably come for us too before long," Ted said dejectedly. "Why did we ever let ourselves get into such a trap?"

"I have asked myself that question about one thousand times," Stanley replied. "It is too late for regrets. What we need now is the courage to face the future."

"Poor Moses! I wonder what they will do to him? It was all my fault. He would not have dared to throw away that confounded powder if I had not given him to understand that we would be glad to get rid of it," Ted said mournfully. "We must try to get to him, or to get word to him some way."

"Of course. We have to think about him and include him in any plan we make. We cannot desert him. We must take all the blame for what he did. He has always been faithful and we will fight for him as hard as we would for ourselves," Stanley replied gravely.

"Let's see if we can find him now," suggested Ted.

They cautiously made their way to the storeroom. A faint light streamed through the open door, and against it was outlined the dark form of a sentinel, standing with spear in hand. Moses could not be seen and no sound came from the interior of the room.

"Come. We can walk on the street for a little while. New surroundings might suggest new thoughts," Stanley then said.

When they reached the outer door of their dwelling they were stopped abruptly. An armed officer barred the way.

"The princes may not pass," he greeted them in a voice of authority, at the same time lowering his lance.

"And who dares stop us?" Stanley demanded angrily. "Stand aside! You shall be properly dealt with for this affront to——"

"You may not pass," the guard repeated, "until the king orders otherwise. Return at once into your quarters and await the pleasure of our gracious sovereign."

There was nothing to do but to obey. The time to strike had not yet arrived.

They sent Urco out on an assumed errand. He had no difficulty in passing the guard and returned a short time later to report that the place was surrounded with officers and soldiers.

Then the attendants of the household began to gather together all the personal effects of the Americans, and also the furnishings of the house. They offered no explanation, and Ted and Stanley did not care to question them.

For a while they watched the proceedings with heavy hearts.

"We must get away from this," Stanley said finally. "Let us go out into the garden. I cannot stand it longer."

"It's terrible," Ted agreed. "Why are they packing up all our things?"

"When any one dies all his property is buried with him."

"Oh!"

They sought a bench by the side of the fountain, in the shade of the blossoming trumpet vines, and sat down, each too occupied with his own thoughts to offer much sympathy or encouragement to the other.

The minutes that followed were filled with torment for the two prisoners. The misfortune that had befallen them seemed overwhelming. They knew that, innocent of any wrong-doing though they were, the minds of the Inca and his court had been poisoned against them, and that there was small chance of escaping from the valley. How could they of a sudden discover the means of egress that months of constant watching and study had failed to reveal?

Minutes passed slowly; they seemed more like hours. Suddenly it dawned upon them that to sit quietly meditating upon the doom that awaited them was the last thing that they should do. If ever action was required it was now. The shock of the evening's momentous events was beginning to wear away.

"Some one is coming this way," Stanley whispered, at the same time raising his head. "Listen!"

The shuffle of bare feet came faintly from the direction of the house, and rapidly drew nearer the arbor in which the two were sitting. The masses of vines

completely hid them from view but through the tangle of intertwining stems they could plainly see what was transpiring in the moonlit garden without.

A number of soldiers, walking singly and with irregular distances between them, were crossing the garden. They passed within a few feet of the spot where the two Americans were hiding; each carried a heavy packet on his back.

"Those are our things," Ted whispered. "They are taking them away."

"Then there must be a door that we know nothing about in the back wall of the garden," Stanley responded. "*Sh!* Here come some more."

Two other carriers bent almost double under the weight of heavy baskets trudged slowly past.

"I have it," Stanley exclaimed excitedly when the last figure had disappeared among the trees. "Don't ask me why or how or anything at all, because there is no time for explanations, but it is our only chance. The next two that come along shall not pass this spot; we must get hold of them in some manner. Pounce on them and wrap something around their heads so they can't call for help. Then drag them in——"

"Here comes one now," Ted interrupted breathlessly.

"You stay here and watch the path unless I call to you for help," Stanley returned, hastily slipping off his tunic. "The next to come along will be your man. Get ready, quick!"

By this time the unsuspecting Indian was directly opposite the clump of vines. When he had passed it a few steps, Stanley sped noiselessly after him. To overtake him was the work of but a second. There was a flash of white through the air and Stanley's tunic

had been thrown securely over the startled man's head. A few quick turns of the end and the hood was tightened to the point of suffocation.

It was all done so quickly that before the astonished and frightened Indian could collect his senses he found himself being pulled along by the strangle-hold around his head and neck. There was no resisting; he could only stumble along after his captor, and a moment later found him sprawled full length under the concealing arbor, gasping and sputtering for breath.

"Get the pack off," Stanley ordered, "and then take off his clothes, quick! We will need them. That's it," as the loose jacket came off. "Now tie his hands behind his back. Tie them good and tight."

Then, after Ted had finished: "Now his feet. That's it, cut another thong off the pack harness."

Ted worked rapidly but thoroughly. At first the man tried frantically to free himself, but when Stanley gave the ends of the hood another twist he stopped struggling and lay limp and helpless. When he was securely bound, they loosened the covering from the prisoner's head, and before he had recovered sufficiently to make an outcry a gag made from a strip of cloth torn from the bottom of Ted's tunic had been forced into his mouth and tied in place.

"I'll get the next one too," Stanley whispered, peering toward the house. "You get into this one's clothes as fast as you can."

"No, let me at him," Ted protested. "It isn't fair to let you take all the chances."

"Do not think about that. I know exactly how to do it now. An outcry would bring some of his companions and spoil everything. There is some one coming now."

A moment later, a second carrier had been safely dragged into the vine-covered shelter. To bind and gag him was the work of but a few minutes. Then Stanley hastily put on his coarse clothing. They also took the turbans from the heads of the prisoners and wound them about their own.

"Now we must get Moses," Stanley whispered. "We have to get hold of him. We are taking desperate chances, but there is no other way out of it. Be ready for anything. We may have to fight for our lives any minute."

They crept from their hiding-place and cautiously made their way to the side of the house. Stealing along the wall and keeping constantly in its dark shadow they soon reached the doorway of the room in which Urco had said Moses was confined.

The yellow candle-light was still streaming through the door, but the sentinel who had been guarding the entrance was gone.

"He may be inside," said Ted.

"Let's wait a minute and listen," Stanley responded. But as there were no sounds within and as no one appeared, the two, after a short wait, quietly entered the room. It was empty.

"We are too late. They have taken him away," Stanley said. "He must have been here earlier in the evening, because we ourselves saw the guard at the door. But he is gone now."

Ted looked dismayed.

"What are we to do now?" he asked. "We cannot go without him."

"We must get out of here as fast as we can. Once outside, we can plan our next move. We have nothing to gain and everything to lose by staying here, as they may come for us any minute."

They hurried back to the shelter. The captives were exactly as they had left them.

"Take one of the packs," Stanley said, "and I will take the other. Do not get into the harness. Balance the bundle on your back the best you can, and hold it with your hands so you can drop it any minute, if necessary. Ready?"

"Yes."

"*Sh!* Here comes some one."

They listened in apprehension to the approaching footsteps, but it was only another pack-laden soldier making his way slowly across the garden. When he had passed their hiding-place Ted and Stanley shouldered their burdens and followed him at a distance of half a dozen yards.

They had not gone far when they were brought to a sudden halt by a sharp voice from somewhere in the darkness.

"Who lives?" the voice demanded.

The carrier who was ahead of them mumbled something of which they understood only the last words.

"Pass on," commanded the voice.

The man walked on and there was nothing for them to do but follow.

Again the challenge of the sentry rang out clear and sharp; this time it was directed at Stanley, who was in the lead.

"Who lives?"

"The king," Stanley answered promptly.

"Stupid pig!" the guard returned. "Huayna Capac, the king!" Then, giving him a violent prod with the handle of his lance, "Now you will remember it. Pass on!"

Ted, having heard all this, had no difficulty in getting

through the gate. Thank heaven, the sentry did not recognize them in the darkness. Scarcely daring to breathe, they walked on and found themselves on a narrow street; it was deserted save for the lone carrier who preceded them.

"We must follow him to the edge of the city," Stanley whispered after a few minutes' walking in silence. "There may be guards along the line watching us even now. Any unusual move on our part would arouse their suspicions and bring them down upon us."

"I have it," Ted returned under his breath. "Why not follow him to where they are taking our things? Perhaps we can get back our rifles; we may need them before long."

"Good. Now let's keep going without talking any more. Even stone walls have ears in a place like this."

They followed their guide through the maze of winding streets the greater part of half an hour. When he stopped to rest, they did likewise, keeping always in the shadows so far as possible. It was fortunate that he did not call to them or attempt to engage them in conversation, for then their identity should have been discovered. But so taken up with his own occupation did he seem that he had no sympathy for another in the same luckless position.

When the houses grew fewer and of a more shambling appearance they knew that the outskirts of the city had been reached.

In the distance the mountains loomed black and solemn against a sky tinted by the eternal fires within the numberless craters of the volcanoes that encircled the valley. Here and there a splash of angry red deepened the belt of crimson light where some seething flood of molten brimstone burst through the restraints



It was deserted save for the lone carrier who preceded them

of the caldron that was powerless to resist its fiery onslaught, and raced down the steep slopes in eager tongues of living fire.

In the open country between the edge of the city and the forbidding mountains gleamed the light of a solitary torch. It was toward this that the Indian made his way, and the two Americans followed close in his wake. The distance was short; before they knew it almost, their man had passed the guiding beacon and disappeared.

As they neared the light they heard the gentle murmur of water below. A dark opening appeared before them, and as their eyes became accustomed to the blackness they discovered a stairway leading down to the flat margin of a stream.

After first looking back to make sure that no one was following them, Ted and Stanley crept cautiously to the edge of the high bluff and looked down. On the narrow spit of sand below were six men. They were taking baskets and bundles from a large heap and piling them carefully into a long dugout canoe. A few pitch torches were stuck about in the sand and gave off an uncertain, smoky light. One of the shadowy forms spoke in a low tone.

"The journey down the river to Uti will be a terrible one."

"Yes, it will be terrible. It is feared that they may drown in the rapids. In that event they would never reach the place of punishment. Uti is an awful place."

"Yes, it is awful," returned the first speaker. "Not in all these years has there been a prisoner sent there. The last to go was Tamichi who——"

"Ugh! My teeth rattle at the thought of it."

"It is said that his spirit has never succeeded in

escaping from the dismal swamp. On still nights his moans and wails can be heard plainly a distance of five hundred paces this side of the great wall."

"But why is the black man there to share the same fate? That I cannot understand. His crime is small compared to that of the two white men."

"It has been rumored that Quizquiz, our noble lord and future king, so desires. They had no right to come here spying on us in the first place, and the valley will be well rid of them all."

Further conversation came to the two listeners only in a blurred and unmeaning murmur of voices. The thing that had attracted their attention was the squatting figure of a man separated by some little distance from the others.

"It is he," Ted whispered into Stanley's ear. "It must be Moses."

"Yes, it is Moses," Stanley replied, straining his eyes to get a better look at the doubled-up figure. "Now is our chance, quick, before any more of the others get here."

"What are we going to do?"

"We must get down there at once and get hold of that canoe. It is six to two, unless we can free Moses so he can help us, before they find out who we are. But it is our last chance, and the only one. With the canoe in our hands we can cross the river and make for the mountains on the other side. What do you say? Are you with me?"

"Of course!" Ted replied, breathless with excitement.

"Come on then. Remember, it will be a fight for our lives. You must free Moses first of all, and whisper our plans to him while you are doing it. I will try to hold the attention of the others in the meantime.

Then, the two of you, when you are ready, cough or whistle; that will be the signal to me. All three of us will have to rush them at once then. Hit straight and hit hard! They mustn't come to until we are well on the other side of the river."

"I am with you," Ted said earnestly. For an instant their hands met in a firm grasp. Then they started down the narrow stairway.

When they reached the river bank the six soldiers stopped working and looked in their direction. The two Americans, stooping low under their packs so as to hide their faces as much as possible, did not pause in their walk toward the heap of baskets lying on the sand; but just before reaching the pile Stanley tripped and fell heavily to the ground. Instantly there was an uproar of laughter from the group of watchers, followed by a chorus of shouts ridiculing the awkwardness of their comrade.

Stanley rose to his feet with difficulty, and groaning with pain began slowly to limp toward the edge of the water; before reaching it, however, he stopped suddenly. Then, in quick succession followed a series of such startling performances that the scene enacted must have been as surprising as it was unusual to the Indians, who stopped laughing and stared in wonder. What they saw was a demented figure leaping and dancing in the moonlight, clutching at his throat or hair one minute, and rolling and moaning on the sand the next. Then he turned handsprings, laughed and cried aloud in turns, and charged back and forth as if pursuing an imaginary enemy. The Indians were spellbound.

In the meantime, Ted quietly dropped his pack and made his way to the side of Moses.

"*Sh!*" he whispered in the startled negro's ear,

"I am Ted. We are trying to get away, and you must help us. Listen!"

Before Moses fully knew what was taking place, Ted was fumbling for the razor he had given him months before, and which he knew the black man always carried fastened to a string around his neck. Then he cut the thongs that bound his hands and feet, at the same time unfolding to him the plans that they had formed a few minutes before.

"Remember, it's up to you as much as to us," he finished hurriedly. "Will you do it?"

"Will I?" Moses replied. "Jes' watch me. I'll wring their necks off of 'em like a chicken's."

"No! You will do nothing of the kind. Just put them to sleep; you know how."

Ted coughed. Instantly, Stanley stopped his antics and looked at him. The Indians, too, looked. They were just in time to see the giant negro and another but smaller figure sweeping upon them with the speed of an avalanche; when they gazed uneasily the other way, they saw Stanley bearing down upon them from that direction. Then the fight commenced.

For a moment the Indians were taken completely by surprise; but before the first of the attackers reached the group they understood their peril, and with the wild cry of *caru-caru-llaktayok* (strangers from the far-away land) they braced themselves to meet the charge.

Ted's first man dropped with a thud, when his fist landed squarely under the point of his chin. But before he could turn, a second Indian pounced upon him from in back and had pinned his arms to his sides in a vise-like embrace. In a flash, he had been rendered helpless. Struggle as he would, he could not free him-

self from the adversary who clung to his back. It was as if he had been suddenly encircled with bands of steel. Back and forth they staggered across the sand, Ted exerting himself to the utmost, the Indian screaming wildly for help but not for an instant relaxing his death-like hold. On the contrary, the arms drew constantly tighter until they threatened to crush the life out of Ted's body. He gasped for breath and with a last powerful effort tried to throw the Indian over his head, but to no avail. That exertion used up the last remnant of his strength; his head reeled; the ground seemed to spin at a furious rate; his knees sank from under him and with a choking, suffocating sensation he fell heavily on his face. Then all was black.

As for Stanley, he had fared even worse. The very first man had succeeded in skilfully evading his savage onslaught, and in an instant they were grappling and rolling on the sand. For a time it was an even break as to which of the two would emerge the victor. Suddenly the Indian released his right arm and made a quick thrust at Stanley's eyes in the hope of blinding him, and thus rendering him powerless to continue the struggle. But fortunately, the thrust missed its mark by half an inch. Stanley's hands shot up and clutched the throat of his opponent; nor would they relax for an instant in response to the clawing and hammering of the Indian, who was now underneath. The blows grew weaker and fewer in number. And just as it seemed that Stanley could not for another moment retain his hold, the warrior stopped struggling and lay still.

Stanley staggered to his feet, to be met by a fusillade of blows that sent him reeling to his knees. More

blows were rained upon him, and he sank helpless to the ground. His eyes saw but dimly the forms of two of the Indian soldiers standing over him in threatening attitude, ready to finish their task if he so much as stirred.

Then, out of the distance rushed a third form that Stanley vaguely recognized as belonging to Moses. He tried to raise himself from the sand, but his arms refused to support his weight. Just then the giant negro reached his side, and seizing one of the Indians in his hands raised him high in the air, and sent him crashing down upon the head of the other.

With a sigh of relief Stanley closed his eyes and knew no more.

CHAPTER XXI

BEYOND THE WALL. THE MAGIC RIVER

WITH the coming of dawn, a lone figure, wild and furtive, emerged from one of the unnumbered dark caverns that honeycombed the mountainside and hastened toward the border of the dismal lagoon.

Food! food! That was the one thought always uppermost in the mind of the half-famished creature. If only the fish-traps had ensnared one of the denizens of the murky water that were as agile and wary as they were numerous, he would feast, tearing the raw flesh with his few remaining teeth and gulping it down in great mouthfuls until not a morsel was left. If not, there would be another day of gathering up the small snails that infested the black, sticky mud-flat and of crunching the tough, tasteless crustaceans that would hold body and soul together, but no more.

At the prospect of food, he hurried his faltering steps. Then, suddenly, he stopped. Where the fish-traps had been, lay a canoe; and men were walking about on the margin of the lagoon, *his* lagoon. Without uttering a sound he turned and fled back to the protecting shelter of the cavern.

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“Remember, Moses,” Stanley was saying, not knowing whether to be angry or dismayed at their present predicament. One eye was swollen completely shut, and his head ached. To think clearly was about as hard a task as he had ever attempted, but he was struggling painfully to banish the hundred and one

things that kept crowding into his brain, and to keep his thoughts on the present rather than on the past.

"Remember," he repeated, "I am not blaming you. We owe everything to you. You pulled us out of an awful fix, and just in time. It was fine and noble, and we shall never forget it. But it is out of the frying-pan into the fire for us."

Ted was moving about with difficulty. He too was suffering from the effects of the previous night's encounter with the soldiers of the Inca.

"It was all my fault," he said faintly. "I did not tell Moses we merely wanted to *cross* the river. Of course, I did not expect that both of us would be knocked out. I thought at least one of us would be on hand to direct things after the fight."

"That's the way, always. It is the unexpected that happens. We were willing to risk everything to keep out of this place, and here we are, beyond the wall. No doubt about it, this is Uti. The place reeks of desolation and terrible things."

"I guess we are buried alive, or what amounts to the same thing."

"And still there is some consolation in the thought that we are out of reach of those monsters on the other side of the wall. Who knows what might have happened if we had tried to reach the mountains across the river? It might have been a worse end than this. And anyway, I am not going to give up hope until the last minute."

"Tell us, Moses, exactly how you brought us here," Ted said. "I can't remember a thing."

Then Moses, haltingly, described how, after all the Indians had been overcome, he had quickly placed the two into the canoe and pushed away from the land.

The journey down that turbulent river, rent by rapids and whirlpools and hemmed in on both sides by jagged bluffs, was one of the never-to-be-forgotten events of his life. At first the water was smooth enough and with scarcely a perceptible current, and the canoe, heavily laden though she was, glided easily along in response to his powerful strokes with the short-bladed paddle. But soon the frenzied stretch of water began; and once within the roaring, swirling maelstrom, the clumsy craft careened and lunged madly through the white-capped waves that leaped and tore at her sides in frantic efforts to engulf her.

How long the wild race lasted, Moses was unable to say. But when it seemed that not one ounce of strength remained with which to wage the unequal battle, the canoe plunged violently into what seemed like a small opening in the mountainside, only to emerge an instant later in a stretch of swift, but smooth water which carried it into the wide expanse of the lagoon. There it had drifted ashore.

"I wonder why that wall was put there," said Stanley when Moses had finished his recital. "I know that Uti means 'the abode of the evil spirits,' but there must be something about the place that started the superstition."

"We may know before very much longer," Ted responded gloomily. "If there is anything evil about any place, we are sure to bump into it."

The daylight was now sufficiently strong to permit them to have the first good view of their surroundings. To the north was the great wall beside which the fortress of Cuzco would have appeared like a row of toy blocks. Rising to a sheer height of over two hundred feet, it completely closed the gap fully half a

mile wide that separated the two mountain ranges. The slopes against which the wall was built was as abrupt as the wall itself. And how the massive blocks of stone were hoisted to their places in the awe-inspiring barrier must remain a mystery.

The space in which the three found themselves was small; in fact, not more than a few square miles in extent, and the greater part of it was taken up by the body of the lagoon.

So far as the mountains that formed the boundaries of the other three sides were concerned, they were as unscalable and as enshrouded in poisonous vapors as those that hemmed in the great valley they had just left. At the far end, the ranges met; it was the lower end of the hidden valley.

"I repeat," Stanley said slowly, "there was some very good reason for building that enormous wall."

"And I repeat, that we shall soon discover the reason. Either there was something in the upper valley they wanted to keep away from here, or there was something here against which they had to protect themselves."

"I wonder if the rifles are among the things in the boat," Stanley said, changing the subject. "Suppose we take a look."

They began painfully to drag the heavy baskets and parcels out of the canoe, and to place them on the shore.

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The sun was high in the heavens when the solitary man again emerged from the cavern in the mountain-side; but this time he was bedecked in all the finery of an Incan noble.

"Look, look!" Stanley cried, springing to his feet

and pointing to the figure that moved spectre-like in their direction.

Ted picked up the single rifle that had been found among the things in the canoe.

"If they are following us, even into this place," he said, nervously fingering the trigger, "they are going to get a warm reception. I cannot stand another thing from them."

"I don't think so," Stanley said hastily. "They wouldn't dare come in here, because there is no way to get back again. Whoever that is, he must have been here before we arrived."

"Tamichi," Ted exclaimed, "it must be Tamichi—the man they were talking about last night. No wonder they said his soul still cries out in the darkness, and that it had never succeeded in escaping from this place. As a matter of fact, he seems very much alive."

"Misery loves company, they say, so he ought to be glad to see us. Surely, he does not intend to start trouble, for there are three of us to his one."

As the man came nearer, they gasped in astonishment. He was old and bent and his dusky skin hung in folds and wrinkles on the bones, that seemed scarcely able to support his meagre weight. But the eyes! They had the fixed, glassy stare of a maniac. For a moment he gazed at them. Then he opened his cavernous mouth and spoke.

"I am king here," he rasped. "My subjects are all around me and they are without number. They give me no trouble, and you too will be welcome—when you join their ranks."

"The poor man is crazy," Stanley whispered. "We must humor him." Then, to the self-styled king: "We are glad to make your acquaintance, and shall willingly

become your subjects if you will tell us what to do. Where are your people?"

"They are here, and there, and everywhere," waving his hand before him. "But they are all dead."

An impressive silence followed.

"All right," Stanley said finally, "anything you say goes here. But you look hungry. Suppose we eat first and talk matters over afterward."

"Eat?" The man's eyes bulged from their sockets. "I have not eaten in years." Then he burst into peals of wild laughter.

"Let's have some of the grub, Moses. Funny, but none of us thought of eating before we saw this half-starved individual. I guess we have Urco to thank that there is any food in the outfit. He must have sneaked it into the packs when no one was looking."

Moses took out some of the bread, meat, and fruit with which many of the golden jars that were in the packages were filled, and spread it on the ground. At sight of the food the man made a dash at it and ate ravenously.

"Tell us your name," Ted encouraged between mouthfuls.

"Loco," he replied promptly. "I am Loco."

"Yes, you are *loco*. But isn't your name Tamichi?"

"It was Tamichi before I came here, a thousand years ago. But now it is Loco."

"Where did you get hold of that word? *Loco* does not belong to your language."

"Yupanqui called me that, long, long ago. I had never heard it before, but I like it. Yes, I am Loco."

"Good! we all admit it. Now tell us something about this place. You will excuse us, I hope, but we are very curious."

Having eaten his fill, Loco evidently was beginning to feel friendlier toward the strangers.

"I have a plan," he announced solemnly. "You shall not die. You shall help me rule my people. That is, the two of you shall help me because I can see that your hearts are white. But the other," pointing to Moses, "his heart is black as the darkest night, for does not his skin show it? He alone shall die."

Moses, of course, did not understand, so Ted translated Loco's speech to him.

For a moment Moses did not know whether to be alarmed or amused.

"Yo' hain't goin' to let him, are yo'?" he asked finally.

"Of course not. Don't be foolish. I was just trying to cheer you up."

"That kin' of talk hain't awful cheerful jest now."

"The black man has a white heart, also," Ted assured Loco. "And besides, he owns all the food. So we had better let him live too, or we shall have nothing to eat."

"Then he shall live because fish are hard to catch and the snails are small and tasteless. Now come with me. I will show you my kingdom."

The demented man led the way to the caves, the three following close in his wake. He talked almost incessantly. At times his speech was rational enough; then he would utter a succession of disconnected words that had no meaning.

"Do you see that wall?" he asked. "That wall was built so long ago that even the amautas who know everything have forgotten how long ago it was."

"Why was it built?" both Ted and Stanley asked in unison.

"To keep the devils in here. They killed the Inca's people by the hundreds. So they walled them in here."

"And what became of them then?"

"They died. But not until many years later. It was the custom to pacify them by sending them treasure and prisoners by way of the river. When they roared louder than usual, offerings were sent to them promptly. You shall see for yourselves."

By this time they had reached the region of caves, of which scores perforated the base of the mountains.

"This is my palace," Loco continued, leading the way into the entrance of one of the caverns. "Yes, this is my palace, and such a one you have never seen before. It has taken years and years to gather together all my treasure, but at last my work is done. Those who came here before me left their riches scattered along the margin of the lagoon. I found them there, and among the yellow gold were the white bones of its former owners. But now everything is here under my roof. I will show you even the links of the great chain that surrounded the plaza in Cuzco."

They followed their guide through a low, dark tunnel that led into a vast chamber in the natural rock. Then they stopped, amazed at what they saw before them.

The cave was of enormous proportions, with a high ceiling that was perforated by a number of holes—doubtless the result of landslides on the slopes above—admitting shafts of bright daylight.

Accustomed as the two had become to seeing gold in the hidden valley, they were nevertheless unprepared for the sight that met their eyes; for the cave was filled with heaps and piles of the precious metal in the form of vessels, plates, and bars. There were hundreds upon hundreds of pieces that must have

aggregated a weight of many, many tons. And there too lay the great chain of which the Spanish conquerors had heard but which had vanished so mysteriously when they at last succeeded in reaching the holy city of Cuzco. The massive links had been hewn or broken apart to make possible their transportation, as each one weighed in the neighborhood of one hundred pounds.

Here at last was the lost treasure of the Incas, just as it had been hastily removed from the outer world nearly five hundred years before to conceal it from the eyes of the rapacious Spaniards. It had been, doubtless, sent into Uti on unmanned rafts. Loco had gathered it up and stored it in the cave.

Ted and Stanley gazed in dumb silence. Words could not be found to express their amazement. Then the rasping voice of Loco broke the spell.

"Now you shall see my subjects; my still, docile subjects over whom I rule supreme." The aged Indian burst into a croaking laugh. "They are good subjects—all of them. Not one has ever given me any trouble."

He led them out of the treasure cave and into another that was smaller but otherwise not unlike it. At sight of its contents Moses gave a wild yell and fled back into the sunshine. For there, neatly arranged in rows, were the remains of men who doubtless had been sent to the dismal place as punishment for their misdeeds or as a sacrifice to the evil spirits that were supposed to make Uti their home.

"There are thirteen rows," the voice of Loco again broke the silence. "And there are thirteen in each row except the last; in that there are only ten. I must fill that row also."

Then he stopped and appeared deeply engrossed in thought, after which he again burst into his croaking laugh.

"Only three more are needed. There are three of you. I must add you to my good, silent subjects after all."

"Suppose you show us the dead gods, and then we will eat," Stanley suggested, quickly changing the subject.

"Yes, yes, the gods. You shall see them too. And then we shall eat. Food, food! The first food I have tasted in a thousand years."

The third cave was shallow but gloomy.

"This is only one of many," the demented guide explained. "I rarely go near them, for who can tell? The gods may some day come to life again. Then I should no longer be king."

On the floor of the cave lay a pile of huge bones, and patches of tawny skin. Stanley went nearer and stooped to pick up a massive skull; from the jaw two enormous, sword-like teeth protruded.

"I suspected it, but I did not dare hope it really true," he said quietly. "It's a sabre-toothed tiger. Now we know why they built the wall, and a good reason it was too. These creatures must have been terrible. They were as big as a horse, and look at these teeth—each one a foot long."

"And when the wall cut off their food-supply they died out?"

"Exactly. This is as big a find as the hidden treasure itself."

"You say there are other caves like this one?" Ted asked the Indian.

"Yes, yes. There are many. And they are all full of bones, of several kinds."

"Good! Now for the food."

"Tell us one more thing," Stanley urged after they had reached the lagoon, and were eating the things Moses had placed before them. "Is there no way out of here—I mean into the outer world?"

"No. The mountains are filled with fire."

"But is there no other way?"

"No."

"Tell me the truth," Stanley shouted, springing to his feet, "or not another mouthful do you get."

The wretched man trembled with fright.

"Spare me! Have mercy," he wailed. "I swear there is no way out—for men. Only the fish in the lagoon can come and go as they will, but you are not fish."

"And how do the fish come and go? Speak! Speak quickly, before it is too late."

"I will show you. But not now. The day is drawing to a close. I am old and feeble. Spare me until to-morrow, and I will show you."

"All right. Until to-morrow then."

When they had finished eating they sent Loco back to his cave for the night. When he had gone, the three boarded the canoe and paddled to the other side of the lagoon.

"We might as well play safe," Stanley explained. "He is crazy and we cannot trust him. If we should sleep over there he might come back in the darkness and cause us trouble. But, having no boat, he cannot possibly cross over to this side, so we are safe."

Early the next morning they returned. They found Loco awaiting them. "Come," he said simply after they had eaten. "I will show you the road the fishes travel. But it will do you no good, for you are men, not fishes."

A half-hour's walk brought them to a spot where a sluggish stream of water emerged from the solid mountain mass. The opening was entirely concealed by shrubbery. They might have searched for it indefinitely without ever suspecting its presence, had not Loco pointed it out to them.

"It is an underground river, all right," Ted admitted sadly. "But the current is running the wrong way. It is coming *into* this place, and we want to get *out*. I am ready to admit that we are completely stumped. You are right, Loco, only the fish can use that road, and we are not fish."

"That is a magic river," Loco croaked. "It is a most wonderful river. Some days it is going into the mountain. But on other days, like to-day, it is coming out of it. Now do you believe it is a magic river?"

Ted and Stanley looked at one another. All the pent-up feeling of months of anxiety and suspense seemed on the verge of bursting the restraints that had held them in check. It should have surprised neither of them had the other broken down and sobbed. But, after a short struggle, they succeeded in mastering their emotions.

"I don't think we could make it in the canoe," Stanley ventured finally. "Because it is too clumsy, but of course we are going to try the river, aren't we? There can't be any rapids, because the water flows both ways; it couldn't do that if there were. The only thing that could cause it to act the way Loco says is that it is a connecting link between this lake and one on the outside. When the water is higher in one lake, it flows into the other to even things up. So the course of the stream must be perfectly level."

"Man alive!" Ted was shouting. "This is too good



They found Loco awaiting them

to be true. I feel almost as good as if we were out already."

It was fully a week before the direction of the river changed. The time had been spent in making reed rafts like the ones they had seen on Lake Titicaca, only smaller in size. Each one was capable of supporting the weight of one man, together with a pack weighing about sixty pounds. In the packs were the rifle, ammunition, photograph negatives, a limited amount of food and clothing, and a number of the smaller and finer vessels and ornaments of gold. Besides the latter, Ted and Stanley each had the necklace of emeralds presented to them by the Inca the day they were made princes.

Before starting on the underground journey, which was not without its perils, they asked Loco if he would not care to join them; but the poor, demented man became panic-stricken with fear at the mere mention of the scheme. He would remain in his little kingdom of the dead, he said, to watch and rule over his silent subjects. Persuasion proving of no avail, they presented him with the greater part of the remaining food and bade him farewell. Then they paddled into the dark opening.

"We may never see daylight again," were Stanley's last words before the current caught the light rafts, and swung them into the blackness. "But it will be quicker and better than lingering in this gloomy prison. Are we downhearted?"

"No!" Ted shouted in response, bolstering up his courage with a show of hilarity. "How about you, Moses?"

"I stuck by yo' this long an' I hain't agoin' to git cole feet now," the negro replied.

They had a last, brief glimpse of Loco, a bent and forlorn figure staring after them with wild, startled eyes. Then the underground river had swallowed them.

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"I was afraid of just one thing," Ted confided to the other two that night. "I was afraid we might come out in the land of the monkey-men. But thank heaven, we are well beyond it. If we had had to fight every step of our way back, as we did in, it would have been the last straw."

"I thought of the same thing," Stanley returned. "We have so much to be thankful for, I hardly know where to begin."

The underground stream had, after a scant half-hour's gentle drifting through a black but high-ceilinged tunnel, brought them into the outer world. As they glided joyously into a small lake that laved the foot of the steep mountain range, they almost instantly recognized the place as the clearing where they had killed the deer so many days before. There were other deer grazing peacefully in the semicircular opening, just as they had been on that other memorable day; but this time they did not shoot any of the graceful creatures.

"We have food enough for several days," Ted explained to Moses when the latter suggested that a dinner of roast venison would be a fitting celebration of their deliverance, "and I am so glad to be out and free again that I could not harm a living thing. It is only a few days from here to Cuzco; the trail we cut coming down will enable us to get back in a hurry."

"The gold in each pack is worth about ten thousand dollars," Stanley said later when they were going

through their packs. "That is, as near as I can figure. And as for the emeralds, it is impossible for us to judge their value. If they are as good as they look, they are worth more than all the gold put together. But besides that, we have located definitely the hidden treasure of the Incas, and we can come back any time we care to and get as much of it as we wish. We have learned many things about the ancient people too, that scientists have been theorizing and disputing about for years."

"I can hardly wait to start home," Ted said eagerly. "So many things could have happened while we were away."

"We had better get a good night's rest and hit the trail early in the morning."

"My! my!" Moses was saying to himself as they were spreading their blankets out on the grass for the night. "Wait till I git back to Barbados! I'll be a rich man. Won't them niggers' eyeballs click when I strut down the street, an' me not noticin' 'em at all, at all!"



